

THE GREATEST GIFT IS LOVE
I. A Gift We Can Seek
II. A Gift That Directs All Others
III. A Virtuous, Selfless Gift
IV. Fully Realized In Christ
1 Corinthians 13:1-13

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2021 | PRE-LENT

QUINQUAGESIMA

<i>Old Testament</i>	Isaiah 35:3–7
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 89:18–29 or Psalm 146
<i>Epistle</i>	1 Corinthians 13:1–13
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 18:31–43

GRANTS PASS Divine Service, Rite Two, p. 60

The Entrance Hymn or Introit – ELH 69, The God of Abraham Praise
Chief Hymn – ELH 240 Jesus, Refuge of the Weary
Distribution Hymn – ELH 329 The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord
Closing Hymn – ELH 442 King of Glory, King of Peace
Farewell to Alleluia (CW Occasional)

MEDFORD Common Order, p. 15

Psalm 146, p. 120
Opening Hymn - **ELH** 69, The God of Abraham Praise
Hymn of the Day – CW 108 Jesus, Refuge of the Weary
Distribution Hymn - CW 135 The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord
Closing Hymn - **ELH** 442 King of Glory, King of Peace
Farewell to Alleluia (CW Occasional)

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1 Corinthians 13:1–13 (CSB)

13 If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. ³And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, ⁵is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. ⁶Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things. ¹²For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known. ¹³Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love—but the greatest of these is love.

Dear fellow redeemed: It's just a coincidence that this text comes on St. Valentine's day. Paul is not addressing the subject of romantic love here, but of course you are free to be informed by these words regarding the true nature of love.

But first realize that here Paul is talking about the nature of spiritual gifts. Some in the Corinthian church were enthralled with what we call the "charismatic" gifts of the Holy Spirit – speaking in different languages without being taught, foretelling the future, receiving revelations into the hidden things of God, or performing miracles.

These gifts were given in the Apostolic Age and at other times in history for the sake of the gospel, but they have not been promised to us. Nevertheless, people still claim to receive them; these groups may be called "faith-healers," Pentecostals or Charismatics. So intent are they on having these gifts that they pretend to have them, even to the point of committing fraud. Rest assured that when our Lord intervenes supernaturally in a life, it is He and He alone who is glorified, not some high-dollar TV preacher.

It is true that the Holy Spirit works in believers; first in creating faith, and then in giving gifts by which He benefits the whole church. ***"Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different activities, but the same God works all of them in each person. A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good."*** (1 Corinthians 12:4–7, CSB) As we considered before, these gifts all differ according to our individuality, while there are other gifts, virtues, to which we can all aspire, and as Paul put it,

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I. A Gift We Can Seek

We cannot aspire to some gifts, not the gifts of miracles or of languages, etc. They are gifts, given where the Holy Spirit chooses. So how can we aspire to the gift of love? Because it is a virtue that the Holy Spirit works in us through the word. As John teaches us, "**We love because he first loved us.**" (1 John 4:19, CSB)

The power of that love is expressed through the gospel, and so it is by cherishing and meditating upon the Word of God that we grow in love and "**may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**" (Ephesians 3:18–19, CSB)

"Love," [AGAPE] as used here is the love that comprehends the person loved, and purposes only good for that person. This is the love that comes from saving faith and therefore arises out of the righteousness God gives us. As we consider the nature of this love, you will despair of achieving it. So you must know that the starting point for you is your justification. By grace, through faith, you have been declared righteous and innocent before God, because of the perfect love that Christ lived out, and is yours by faith.

We have the righteousness of Christ, and so we seek to live it out in life.

II. A Gift That Directs All Others

What shall we say of this love? It is the gift that directs and shapes the way we use all our gifts and talents – all that we are. Without it, really, nothing is good. **13 If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.**

Again, "love," [AGAPE] as used here is the love that comprehends the person loved, and purposes only good for that person. To comprehend a person is to know them completely. Jesus knew Peter, a faithful, but impulsive, egotistical man who vacillated between heroism and cowardice, who would end up betraying him; and he loved Peter and wanted what was truly good for him. Jesus knew John, whom we don't see as conspicuously wonderful as a disciple, and loved him. Jesus knew Judas, right down to the core of his black heart, and desired that he turn from his wickedness, and Jesus loved him too. This is love that comprehends and purposes what is good.

Without it, no speech is good, no understanding of Scripture is beneficial, no miraculous powers will accomplish good, and no sacrifice is virtue. For it purposes not what is truly good.

III. A Virtuous, Selfless Gift

This love is outward-looking, aimed at giving, not receiving. It is selfless. **4 Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, 5 is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. 6 Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

Imagine living your life without harboring any memory of the wrongs done to you! I said you would despair of achieving it, yet by faith you are counted as having it, for the perfect life of Christ is counted as yours. "**For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.**" (Galatians 3:27, CSB) Christ did not nurse resentment over what the

soldiers did to Him. He forgave them. Fight the false leaders of the people as He did, He did not recite their outrages on the cross.

To put this in perspective, there are many opinion-molders and people of power who are misrepresenting Christians these days. Haters, white supremacists, racists, bigots, etc. are ways people describe Christians. Try against it as we might, our beliefs are dragged into the political melee, because the Christian faith is always a challenge to absolute power. I can give you a list of outrages as long as your arm, but while they are instructive, we keep no record to nurse resentment. **Love ... bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

IV. Fully Realized In Christ

Now here is an astounding thing: This is how you are loved. This perfect love is the love of Christ Himself. It was to bring such love into this world that He was born. It was to bring such love into the world so that it could be yours by grace through faith. For it is through Him that the righteousness of God can be given to any of us. As Paul says, “... ***Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith.***” (Philippians 3:8–9, CSB)

So you and I and all Christians are counted as having such love, and truly by God’s grace in a measure we live out this love, and indeed it will one day be perfected in us. ¹² **For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known.** ¹³ **Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love—but the greatest of these is love.**

AMEN