

“We Are Nothing Without Love”
Jeremiah 1:4-10, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
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Let me ask you an easy question. Among these three, faith, hope and love, what do you think is the greatest of these? Yes, it is love. One Sunday, I was supposed to lead the children’s time during service. The Scripture reading was the same as today’s New Testament reading, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. This chapter is very well known to many Christians, and even one of the most popular Scripture reading for weddings. So I asked our children what is the greatest of these three among faith, hope and love assuming to hear the right answer, “Love”, but their answer was “hope”. At the moment, I was at a loss what to explain to our children. Actually, it made me think, “Why is love more important than faith and hope?” Do you know why? This morning, we would like to learn about the unique meaning of love.

We all know what love is, but love is still a big word. We need to be more specific. We have heard about Greek words about love. Eros refers to the body, philo and Sophia combine to mean love of wisdom. Lastly, Agape refers to God’s unconditional love. Christianity is all about love. Jesus came from heaven and taught us about God’s love which was the reason for Jesus’ birth, public ministry, death and resurrection. Apostle Paul sent a letter to the Corinthian church and reminded them that love is everything. What in the world is love?

When I was a graduate student, one semester I had a chance to study about Socrates, and Aristophanes in Plato’s book, *Symposium*. Symposium describes different perspectives of love from the ancient philosophers. For example, Aristophanes mythologically explains love with a concept of Eros, a desire to find the other half of our body. “Why do people fall in love?” He argues that in nature, we want to feel “whole” when we have found our partner. In his theory, in primal times, people had two complete bodies so the whole bodies were connected. So the people had double power. You can picture two powerful bodies connected together and inseparable. They were very powerful and strong which threatened the gods. Zeus, the god of gods, decided to cripple them by separating them into two separate beings. So he claimed that two people who were separated from each other would find their other half.

Another philosopher, Socrates explains his perspective that Love is the son of “resources” (father) and “poverty” (mother), a desire to be perfect. Understanding these three tenants leads to acquiring wisdom which is the basis

of 'platonic love'.

But today in our New Testament reading, the Apostle Paul teaches us a different concept of love. Listen to this adaptation of his words.

“Love never gives up.
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't strut.
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others.
Isn't always 'me first,'
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others.
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going on to the end.”

Our sermon title, “We Are Nothing Without Love”, I believe this is true. In a sense, our life is a journey to fill ourselves with love. Love could be a desire to find the other half for fulfilling our wish to feel “whole” by Eros, or it could be a desire to pursuing wisdom, self-success. However, Apostle Paul suggests a different standard. This love is not an egotistic nor self-centered focus. It is more relationship-oriented virtue and more other-centeredness direction. This love emphasizes how I get along well with others and even strangers.

Actually, there was a reason why Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of love to his church people. Paul heard that there were serious conflicts inside the Corinthian church community. In the congregation, some people boasted about their spiritual gifts. Some showed off their spiritual gift to speak in tongues and others show off their faith. So they believed that they were spiritually more closer to God. Some people were proud of their special gifts of ability to speak the prophecy or to preach God's word with power. But Paul says you are nothing without love. In confidence, he gives the Corinthian church a warning message. No matter what you have, if you don't have love, you are bankrupt! Love is patient, kind, humble and compassionate to others. If you have these, you are rich.

Jesus Christ began a new movement that God loves everyone. God accepts whoever you are regardless of your gender, ethnicity and your circumstances. All are welcome. We know that Jesus met many marginalized people such as the Samaritan woman, a gentile woman, an adulterous woman who was abandoned,

a tax collector who was excluded from the community and he welcomed many people who were forgotten in the name of the law. Jesus proclaimed that God loves everyone no matter what and reminded us that we are children of God.

Apostle Paul established and planted churches including the Corinthian church. What is church? Church is a divine and earthly place commissioned to pursue Jesus' movement spreading out mutual respect, unconditional and genuine acceptance and embracing each other as brothers and sisters without any judgment. Spiritual gifts are great and wonderful, but these are not the essence of church. If there is no love, it is nothing. In other words, if we don't have spiritual gifts, but if we have love for one another among us, we are the church.

Jesus showed us a different concept of love and Paul gives us a lesson of what church should be. Love is everything. This reminds me of the origin of the word, chapel. The word, chapel or the associated word, chaplain is originated from the Latin word, "capella" which means "small cape". It is a story about Saint Martin. When Martin was a soldier, he saw a beggar. He cut his military cloak in half to give part to a beggar in need. The other half he wore over his shoulders as a small cape. The beggar, the stories claim, was Christ in disguise and Martin experienced a conversion of heart, becoming the first monk. This cape came into the possession of the Frankish kings, and they kept the relic with them as they did battle. The tent which kept the cape was called the *capella* and the priests who said daily worship in the tent were known as the *capellani*. From these words, we get the names "chapel" and "chaplain".

So, what makes our church a Christ-like church? The key is love as action. Look at Paul's advice again. There is nothing for you intellectually or for your knowledge. It always emphasizes your practice and service. Let me share this letter with you. *[Shared a letter from North Carolina.]* If the love of God fully works within us, the Spirit of God will lead us to welcome new people, to encourage the ministry of mission and outreach programs for our community and the world. Love moves us out of our comfort zone. Faith helps us to stay close to God, hope strengthens us to hold onto the vision of God, but love leads us from the present to the future by the guidance of the Spirit. That is why love is the greatest of these. Our Old Testament reading reminds us of a calling for Jeremiah. God said, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to build and to plant." I believe, in the same way, God calls to the church and puts His love in our hearts. As a church, we go and speak God's words of love and acts of love to the world so that people know we are Christians by our love. Amen.