

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

^{13:1} If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

O God, you form the minds of your faithful people into a single will. Make us love what you command and desire what you promise, that among the many changes of this world, our hearts may ever yearn for the lasting joys of heaven; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. I am the way, the truth, and the life, says the Lord. Alleluia. (John 14:6 cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

In our Gospel lesson this week, we are back in the upper room on the night of the Passover, Maundy Thursday, as we have come to call it. Jesus is preparing His disciples for some pretty dark days to come. Preparing them for that night, the next day and the scenes which will war with their minds, seek to crush their spirits. He is also preparing them for the new reality which will follow the Resurrection. Oh, He'll pop in from time to time allowing them glimpses of reality and proofs of their victory, but they will not see Him as much as they have the last three years. You and I will not see Him at all, at least not with our physical eyes.

Other than the prize that is the Supper of the Lord what does our Savior leave them with that night? A command, a decree that His people should love one another. In fact, it will be a marker of the people of God (Luke 13:34-35). But why Love? An emotion which is often unsteady, here today and gone tomorrow, so easily effected by the events and deeds of those around us? Or to use words which were once popular in 1984, yep that's 35 years ago, **WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?**

That's where the words of 1 Corinthians 13 come in. Often spoken at weddings, these words present us with a huge list of examples of what love is, even as they remind us that love is important. In fact, it's everything even though we often fail at it.

Paul explains, *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.* ² *If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.* ³ *If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.* We should probably begin by putting to rest the idea that this love is something as fleeting as emotion. Oh, it's there or will accompany this love but it is far more an act of the will. It loves because it has chosen to, elected to and often even in the absence of a reason too. It's why Scripture so often assigns this agape – love to God but more on that in a moment.

If then this love is absent in our lives, Scripture goes even a step farther, then you can do nothing, gain nothing, profit nothing in the world around you regardless of how gifted you maybe. Why? Because it all becomes pure selfishness. Self-serving, self-preserving action which may even do nice things but only to be recognized, noticed, praised or one up someone else. So Paul goes so far as to say feel free to use all the gifts of the Spirit but if this want for the good of others, if love for others is lacking consider them nothing. Pretty massive statement, no?

So perhaps we should consider what this love is. Paul continues, ⁴ *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.* ⁵ *It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.* ⁶ *Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.* ⁷ *It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.* True confession time. Every time I read these words of God, I get a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. How about you? Love is patient – ponder that one the next time your stuck in traffic. Always kind – unless you get my order wrong or cause me extra work. Doesn't envy – why do they get all the breaks? Doesn't not boast – not even the humble brag. It is not proud – not unless you are going to tell me I am wrong. Not rude – I'm just honest and people can't handle it. Self-seeking – then none of the others would be present. Not easily angered – remember God reads the mind and heart not just the words and fist. It keeps no record of wrongs – except for so and so, their evil and the whole world needs to know it. Then come those always statements: *always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.* Of course, since the others already have fallen then so have these. And then comes one final blow to the self-serving attitudes which so often control our lives. *Love never fails.* I must once more crumble before an almighty God for me and my love gain nothing. I am nothing.

Have you joined me yet in that sinking feeling as we contemplate the love which God demands of His people? Remember Jesus gives but one command on the night of His betrayal. He leaves only one thing for us to do. But then like all law, It finds its fulfillment.

But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ *For we know in part and we prophesy in part,* ¹⁰ *but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.* ¹¹ *When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.* ¹² *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.* ¹³ *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

You see all acts of humanity will ultimately pass away into oblivion, even the things we often like to think attain us something in this life of ours. Prophecies, tongues, knowledge, it all will pass away and be quieted. Everything in this life of ours is imperfect but even this will disappear when perfection comes, when we see love face to face.

You see love has already found its fulfillment, not in us but in God. John announces it. *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins* (1 John 4:10). Even as Jesus gives the command He has begun to keep it for us. He is preparing to display that love for us. It's the cross all over again. There God demonstrates His love for fallen mankind, for the self-serving love we so often display. Amazing love, unfathomable love is what our God has given to us. So John will write it twice in eight verses, *God is love* (1 John 4:8, 16).

It is because of that love at you and I have a place to turn as we crumble before the righteousness of our almighty God. You have been given forgiveness. It is because of this that one day our sinful selfishness will be put to rest and the perfect one will bring our perfection. As we stand before God face to face with the love of God, His love will be all we need, as hope gives way to reality and faith gives way to sight.

So Paul tells us this love will change us, has changed us. God's perfect love overwhelms us and overcomes our self-centered love. We have caught sight of a new reality one we yearn and hope for and therefore one we hold out. God's love for me, shown nowhere as clearly as he displays it at the cross and in my forgiveness inspires forgiveness of my own. In traffic, when I'm wrong and when I'm wronged even with strangers and with so and so who might have even had it coming. Again John says it so wonderfully, "*We love because he first loved us* (1 John 4:19)."

And so an answer forms to our questions. Why would Jesus leave that command? What's love got to do with it? Everything my friends for without it we are nothing but because we have seen Christ face to face through the eyes of faith well we have gained everything. So he bids us dwell on Him on His love and yes in so doing feed our own until His return, until perfection brings perfect love for all eternity. Amen!