

Scripture:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

“Without love it’s pointless.”

I want to open with a couple of quick questions ----- and the first one is this -----

What do you suppose Jesus looked like when He walked the earth?

What do you suppose Jesus looked like when He walked the earth?

Was He a white man with a full beard ----- long hair ---- with sparkling blue eyes and aquiline features?

Or was He a black man ----- perhaps with a patchy ---- or spotty beard --- with high cheek bones ---- and a tiny little nose --- and deep brown eyes?

Maybe He was a brown skinned man --- with no beard ----- and green eyes ----- and huge lush lips --- and giant floppy ears --- and ---- perhaps He was bald.

Then again ----- maybe He was Asian.

Maybe He had great big eyes ----- wide apart on His head --- or tiny little eyes ----- close together ---- tight to His nose.

Who really knows ----- and does it really even matter?

But --- just for fun ----- What do you suppose Jesus looked like?

Well ----- the answer is ----- love.

Love ---- is what Jesus looked like.

Another question -----

What actions or habits ----- do you think ---- most characterized Jesus?

Speaking in tongues?

Prophesizing?

Preaching --- and teaching?

Giving to --- and caring for the poor?

Admonishing people?

Reading --- talking ----- building ---- playing games?

And ---- once again the answer is love.

Love ----- is what characterized Jesus.

And now ---- a final question -----

What is Jesus most remembered for?

What is Jesus most remembered for?

His virgin birth?

Being killed like a common criminal on a cross?

Having been betrayed?

All of His miracles?

Having been God and human at the same time?

Having risen from the dead ---- His resurrection.

And once again ----- the answer is love ---- Jesus is remembered for His love --- specifically His saving love.

And that's a big part of what we've celebrated here today in baptism --- God's saving Love in Jesus Christ ----- granted to Adalyn --- not because of anything she has done --- but because of what God has done for her.

In our reading from 1 Corinthians today ----- a reading most often associated with weddings ----- Paul boldly and bluntly re-iterates what Jesus first said in Matthew's gospel in the Sermon on the Mount.

And that is ----- "that love matters more than anything else."

"That love matters more than anything else."

Paul argues that if we do things without love --- then those things are pointless --- "nothing" ----- is indeed the word he chooses.

"If I speak in tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 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 do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

I am nothing ----- and ---- I gain nothing ----- without love.

If I do all of these wonderful ----- things ----
 speak in tongues ----
 speak like an angel ----
 prophecy ----
 have great faith --- faith enough to move mountains even -----
 if I give all I have to the poor.

If I do all these things --- but don't do them in love ----- they mean nothing
 --- I am nothing --- I gain nothing ----- they are pointless.

So Paul argues in 1 Corinthians today.

And the great 18th century Reformed preacher Jonathan Edwards in a sermon on this passage from 1 Corinthians today ---- reminds us that Paul is saying that it is possible to operate in the power of the Spirit of God through miracles and Spiritual gifts and not actually be a Christian.

He argues that you can build a great ministry for God --- doing miracles -----
 -- speaking in tongues ---- having great faith --- sacrificing everything you
 have for others ----- and still not necessarily be a faithful --- or authentic
 follower of Jesus Christ.

He reminds us that Paul calls all of these actions ----- “nothing” ----- if we
 don’t also have love.

And of course Paul does this in reference to the words of Christ Himself
 from Matthew 7 verses 21-23 from the Sermon on the Mount.

Where Jesus says -----

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of
 heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your
 name ----- and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform
 many miracles? Then I --- and this is Jesus speaking ----- Then I will tell
 them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers.’”

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of
 heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

“Only the one who does the will of my Father.”

So what is the will of the Father?

And the answer is simple ----- love --- love is the will of the Father.

God’s greatest act ----- God’s will most clearly expressed ----- is His sending
 Jesus Christ in love --- saving love.

And Jesus continues saying ----- “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord,
 Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons
 and in your name perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I
 never knew you. Away from me you evildoers.’”

In other words Jesus says --- just because you prophesied in my name -----
 just because you drove out demons in my name --- just because you
 performed many miracles in my name ----doesn’t mean you know me --- or I
 know you ----- doesn’t mean you love me.

Love is the key.

Indeed without love it is pointless.

Without God's love it is pointless.

What we celebrated here today --- Adalyn's baptism ----- is a perfect example of --- without love --- without the gift of God's gracious love ----- it's pointless.

The sacrament isn't about what Adalyn has done ----- it's all about what God has done.

Loved us --- loved us with a grace that knows no boundaries.

And ---- as Paul rightly says ----- if we miss this --- all the rest is ----- "nothing".

Love matters more than anything else precisely because love reveals Jesus Christ more than anything else.

Love shares Christ to the world more than anything else --- and the reason is simple ----- because more than anything else --- God is love --- Jesus is love.

Paul Scazzero in his ground breaking book --- The Emotionally Healthy Church ----- in speaking about 1 Corinthians 13 says that --- "The level of power and gifting operating through a Christian's life has little to do with spiritual maturity. Paul tells us that you can use spiritual gifts and still be very much a spiritual baby."

He goes on to say that --- "the sign of the Spirit at work is supernatural love, not gifts or results."

And he concludes saying ----- "This love ---- divine love --- and not mere human --- emotion or sentimental love ----- requires a supernatural ---- work of grace in the heart."

Here it is again --- because it's fair bit to take in.

“The level of power and gifting operating through a Christian's life has little to do with spiritual maturity.

Paul makes the point that you can use spiritual gifts and still be very much a spiritual baby. The sign of the Spirit at work is supernatural love, not gifts or successful results. This love requires a supernatural --- or divine --- work of grace in the heart.”

He's right on ----- what matters most is love --- not spiritual maturity --- the gifts themselves --- or the results of the gifts ----- but love.

And of course the love that Paul is speaking about is a gift from God ----- and not something we can self generate.

The sign of the Spirit at work is love --- supernatural divine --- God originated love --- not gifts ---- not success ---- not faith that moves mountains ---- not prophesying ---- not driving out demons --- not standing up and professing one's faith ----- not giving all you have to the poor ----- but love.

“If I speak in tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 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 do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”

Without love everything else is pointless.

“By this the world will know that you are my disciples --- if you love one another.” ----- Jesus says in John 13 verse 35.

“By this the world will know that you are my disciples --- if you love one another.”

What leads people to Christ ----- love.

Love is what shows people we are of Christ.

Love --- God's saving love in Jesus Christ --- is what changed human history forever.

And for those who may be thinking the Beatles had it right --- when they said ---- "All you need is love."

Well no ---- they didn't get it right --- it's ---- "All you need is Jesus."

Jesus is love ---- yes.

And all you need is Jesus and His divine saving love ----- not just weaker --- ---- and far more fickle ----- human --- emotional ---- sentimental love.

But Divine --- saving --- love.

Love that is ----- as Paul says -----

"Patient ----- kind ---- never envious ----- never boasting ---- never proud.

Not capable of dishonouring others ---- never self-seeking ----- not easily angered --- never keeps record of rights or wrongs.

Never delights in evil ----- always rejoices with the truth --- always protects - ----- always trusts --- always hopes --- always perseveres.

Never fails love."

All these things that Paul lists in attempting to characterize love --- are precisely what Jesus lived out.

Patient ----- kind ---- never envious ----- never boasting ---- never proud.

Not capable of dishonouring others ---- never self-seeking ----- not easily angered --- never keeps record of rights or wrongs.

Never delights in evil ----- always rejoices with the truth --- always protects - ----- always trusts --- always hopes --- always perseveres.

Never failing.

And of course so much more.

And Paul knows there is so much more.

There's always much more to Christ than words can ever express ----- that's why he says -----

“For now we see only a 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.” ---- in verse 12 from our scripture reading today.

Without love it's all pointless.

Without divine love ---- without God's love that is Jesus Christ ---- it's all pointless.

O.K. great got it --- love.

But what exactly is this love that I am trying to understand and live out --- how do I know I've got it right?

Well this love --- Paul says ----- this love that is Jesus Christ ---- isn't just about talking about Him in fancy phrases or tongues ----- it isn't just about having great faith ----- it isn't just about helping others out ----- it's about being ----- patient ----- kind ---- never envious ----- never boasting ---- never proud.

Not capable of dishonouring others ---- never self-seeking ----- not easily angered --- never keeping record of rights or wrongs.

Never delighting in evil ----- always rejoicing with the truth --- always protecting ----- always trusting --- always hoping --- always persevering.

Never failing.”

Simply put ----- it's all about trying to be like Jesus.

It's about trying to be like Jesus.

All the rest --- if we're not trying to be like Jesus ----- is nothing.

If we share Jesus or give to the poor ---- if we have great faith and profess it where ever we go ----- if God so gifts us to perform miracles even --- and we don't also have the love of Jesus in our hearts ----- we have missed the whole point.

Some people do all kinds of good ----- Jesus stuff ----- but don't really love ---- aren't all that capable of --- or interested in true Christian love.

Jesus' response to these kind of people is simple --- Matthew chapter 7 verse 21-23 --- my paraphrase ----

“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father. ----- Many will say to me ---- but Jesus I did all kinds of good Christian stuff in your name. ----- To which Jesus will say ---- but you didn't love me --- which by the way also includes loving others just as I loved others. ----- So --- in truth ----- I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.”

Love doesn't just try ----- it just is.

Without love.

Without God's love in Jesus Christ ---- it's all pointless.

Love is a gift.

Love is ---- among other divine attributes ---- Patient ----- kind ---- never envious ----- never boasting ---- never proud.

Not capable of dishonouring others ---- never self-seeking ----- not easily angered --- never keeping record of rights or wrongs.

Never delighting in evil ----- always rejoicing with the truth --- always protecting ----- always trusting --- always full of hope --- always persevering.

Never failing.

May we go now in peace ---- reflecting on what it means to truly love God --
----- and therefore to also truly love one another.

May we go in peace ----- trying figure out how we can be more loving in
genuine and authentic ---- Christ like ways.

And ----

May we see Christ in everyone we meet --- and therefore see them as worthy
of our love.

And may everyone we meet ----- experience the love of Christ in us.

Because without love ---- God given ---- Christ centered love ----- all the
rest is pointless.

Amen.