

4 Epiphany C - 31 January 2010
Jeremiah 1:4-10; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30
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Well ... how is your love life??? Paul's letter to the Corinthians as read in this morning's epistle contains some of Paul's most beautiful lines he ever penned. If we do not have Love, we are nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love rejoices in the truth; love bears all things; love believes in all things; love hopes all things; love endures all things. I am sure that upon reading or hearing Paul's words we are stirred to think about the meaning of love in our lives, and God's love for us and ours for Him.

Paul's declaration of love is quite a popular reading. We are especially fond of Paul's proclamation of love as we often find this reading in wedding ceremonies, funerals, and renewal of wedding vows. I recently recommended this reading for the wedding anniversary celebration of life long friends. They were deeply moved by Paul's passage on Love. This explosion of love reminds me of a newspaper article from long ago:

The New York Times once reported that the wall of The New York Public Library had been defaced. Apparently an energetic boy took it upon himself to draw a heart in chalk on the building. Inside this masterpiece he scrawled, Billy Mayer loves everybody. Billy had put the essence of Paul's message in a few poignant words. Love is everything.

The love of God for His people is everlasting. The fifth century bishop and theologian Saint Augustine once wrote, " God loves you as if you were the only one to love." and others say that we were created from God's excess love. God pours His love into us. In fact, the greatest evidence of the love of God is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for our salvation. God's greatest gift to us is His love. God does not stop by just giving His love to us; He has also places His love within us. I want to repeat this because I think it's really important. God does not stop by just giving His love to us; God also places His love within us. Jesus once said that the world would know we are His disciples by the

love we have one for another. Not only does God love us, but God has also causes us to love!

The early Latin theologian and writer, Tertullian of Carthage, declared that the one thing that converted him to Christianity was not the arguments people gave him, because he could find a counterpoint for every argument they would present. "But" he writes, "they demonstrated something I didn't have. The thing that converted me to Christianity was the way they loved each other."

Here was one of the primary problems with the church in Corinth. The Apostle Paul is writing to the Christians there, and we can figure out some of what is going on with them. The Corinthians are manifesting every spiritual gift in existence, and that is fine. However, they are not manifesting to each other the greatest spiritual gift of all, the gift of love.

The call to love is a call to Christ likeness and to maturity in the midst of childishness and fleshly living, that is, living for worldly things of the body and not the soul. Paul writes these great words to remind the Corinthians that of all the great spiritual things they can do, the greatest spiritual exercise is love. It is the central focus of the Jesus' message, the message of His life and ministry. The effect of Paul's words are to remind the Christians in Corinth and to remind us here this morning that people may possess all kinds of spiritual gifts and abilities. But that we are never more like the Lord Jesus Christ than when are exercising the gift of love. Listen to what Paul claims here. In his view, love is superior to everything else we can be or do! I think he is right.

In the opening prayers of The Holy Eucharist: Rite One, we read the words of Matthew's Gospel: "Hear what our Lord Jesus saith: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two

commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

You shall love God with all your heart, soul, and mind; you are to love your neighbor with the same love you have toward yourself. Love is the greatest gift, and love is superior to everything else that we might do.

When he was running for president, one of Abraham Lincoln's most outspoken political enemies was a man named Edwin J. Stanton. Stanton would call Lincoln a "low cunning clown" and the "original gorilla". He even said, "It is ridiculous for people to go to Africa to see a gorilla, when they could find one easily in Springfield, Illinois." To Lincoln's credit, he never responded to these insults. Yet, when he was elected President, Lincoln chose this same Stanton to be his Secretary of War. When asked why he chose Stanton, Lincoln said, "Because he is the best man!" Later, when Lincoln had been assassinated, Stanton stood by the coffin that contained Lincoln's body and said through his tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." Love is patient. Patient love put into action won Stanton over in the end!

There are times when our life is like a stormy sea. Times when we need to anchor ourselves to someone or something stronger than ourselves. Times when we need a strong rope to bind us to a Rock of safety. If we aren't properly anchored, there is a tendency to drift when the storms come. Paul tells us of such a spiritual rope, a spiritual anchor. When Love is utilized and exercised, it enables us to weather any storm that arises in our lives.

Yes, we may have a tendency to drift away or even to run away when the pressure is on. It's then that we need to bind ourselves to the things of God and to determine in our hearts that we will stand for God's gift of love, regardless of what others may do! And we need at such times to rest in God's love, and find there – to find here – our anchor, our security. Paul tells the Corinthians then and us now that love is the answer, that is, the love of God and the love of each other.

I think genuine biblical love is a rare commodity in today's world. There are plenty of manifestations of fleshly and worldly love, which is evident in our

materialistic and violent world. But, genuine love is hard to find! If you and I do not possess love for the people around us, we will fall away from our neighbors. If we do not possess the love for the Lord, we will fall away from God! Without genuine love, we are wasting our time trying to live for the Lord. Why? Because we will always be out of step on one level or the other!

When we love the Lord, as we should, nothing will be allowed between us. When we love our brother and sister, as we should, nothing will stand between us! It is genuine love that keeps all the relationships in our life in perfect balance!

Dear friends, I think God invites us this morning to take every thing we hold in great value and place them aside. Forget our talents, and our gifts, and our potential, and our positions, and anything else we may want to mention.

How is your love life? Do you love like God? Do I? Does this morning's reading leave you or leave me with the feeling that we love the way that God tells us to love? Or, do we get the feeling that there is room for improvement?

Jesus Christ, through Paul, is calling us. Like in this morning's first reading, Jeremiah reminds the people in his own day, and himself that we are called to a greater purpose in life than all the distractions that the world affords. We are called to become God's voices, proclaiming Christ's love, grace, and redemption to the world. The more we experience God's love in this community, the more we learn to love like Jesus. Our love will enable us to reach out side of our church community and proclaim God's love to our neighbors and world.

Tomorrow I am going to start my day with a question. I invite you to do the same. Tomorrow let's start the day by asking ourselves, how is my love life going to go today?

Lord your love is kind.

Your love, O Lord, forever will we sing.

AMEN