

2nd Sunday after Trinity Morning Prayer

Psalms: 15, 19

First Lesson: Job 31:13-28

³ If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me;

¹⁴ What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?

¹⁵ Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?

¹⁶ If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail;

¹⁷ Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof;

¹⁸ (For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;)

¹⁹ If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering;

²⁰ If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep;

²¹ If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate:

²² Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone.

²³ For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure.

²⁴ If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence;

²⁵ If I rejoice because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much;

²⁶ If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness;

²⁷ And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand:

²⁸ This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 13

¹³ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

⁴ Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

⁵ Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

⁶ Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

⁷ Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

⁸ Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

¹⁰ But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

¹² For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

¹³ And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Introduction

After High School, I traveled to Salem, Oregon to study at Willamette University. I made many friends and enjoyed my time there very much. As many of you know, my father died right before I left to go to school. As a result, I often reflect back onto my college days as a time I had to grow up quickly. I had to take on responsibility, and I often felt like transient as I would return home to Idaho, three times a year. As a result, I met a lot of people, but it was hard to find lasting relationships during those years, as I was never in the same place for very long.

It was during my Sophomore year I met Shawn. He was a shy guy who kept to himself but enjoyed playing basketball, going to movies or hanging out playing

video games. He had a quiet decency about him and was easy to like. He had known my roommate because they went to the same High School, so it seemed natural to spend time together. Shawn used to lament that he wanted to find a girlfriend, but his shyness and his lack of self-confidence often got in the way of meeting anyone. When my roommate and I would go to school dances or out with dates, he would often stay back in the dorm by himself. That was until he met Ashley. They were in a class together and ended up working on a project when something between them clicked. It was love at first sight. Before long they were inseparable and were so genuine in how they communicated and showed affection it was heartwarming. I honestly felt a little envy when I watched them together and wished I could have a real love like that. They were best friends, two forces against the world. It was only logical that after we all graduated, they would get married. The wedding was amazing, so much love and support it was awesome to be a part of their lives. Everything was great and they looked forward to a wonderful life together, until Ashley got sick. It was a fast moving, deadly form of cancer that came in without warning. I watched Shawn take her to Portland to see specialists and as she endured chemotherapy and surgery. Throughout it all, Shawn remained steadfast in his love and devotion to her. He bathed her, he spoon fed her, he learned how to do her hair, and he cleaned up when her body lost all control. He nursed her, he read to her and he loved her until the end, when she quietly passed

away with him by her side. If I remember, one of our friends read the passage we heard today from first Corinthians at their wedding. At the time, I remember hearing it as Shawn and Ashley smiled at each other, full of high emotion, as the words washed over them: "*Love never fails.*" It sounded incredibly romantic. But it occurred to me as I was writing this homily, that if you want to see what 1 Corinthians 13 actually means, the type of love that St. Paul is actually referring to, you have to leave the wedding chapel and go forward to real life and how our circumstances test this love. We might see it in a quiet, sterile ICU room or a memory care unit. We might see a spouse who has spent the last three years sleeplessly caring for a partner who no longer remembers their name or sitting in the ICU watching their spouse battle for life after a car accident. We might see them gently feed them, clean up their messes, and sit in a plastic chair for hours just to hold a frail hand. There are no flowers here, no high energy music and no romantic version of love. In these times, there is only a raw, stubborn, daily decision of the will to set ourselves aside for the needs of, and in service of, those we love.

We love to read this passage from 1 Corinthians at weddings because we mistake Paul's definition of "charity", or love, for an emotion. Emotions are fragile; they often fail when the bills pile up, when health breaks down, or when a spouse becomes difficult to love. Paul wrote this chapter to a church that was

acting like spiritual children who were immature or rebellious, chasing emotional highs and religious status symbols. He is telling them, and us, that the things the world envies; eloquence, knowledge, spectacular success, and physical beauty will eventually fade away. The only thing that outlasts the wreckage of this life is the gritty, unromantic, choice-driven charity that seeks to will the good of another, It looks a lot less like a wedding gown and a lot more like a cross and it should remind us of who was crucified for us on it.

Body

In the order of Morning Prayer, just after we declare our penitence and receive the assurance of God's pardon, the minister leading the service says, "*O Lord, open thou our lips,*" and the people respond,(wait for congregation to answer) "*And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.*" It is a beautiful liturgical pivot. We move from the heaviness of confessing our sins to the joyful saying of the Psalms and Canticles.

In our second lesson for today, St. Paul hands us a tool to measure and look at our life in his first letter to the Corinthians. He reminds us that it is entirely possible for our lips to be opened, for our voices to ring out with angelic eloquence, and yet for the sound to be nothing more than a "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal" (1Cor. 13:1). Without one vital ingredient, our finest liturgy, our

most energetic singing, and our most relevant church programs are reduced to white noise. That ingredient, of course, is *Agape*, translated so enduringly in the King James Bible and our prayer books as charity. This term refers to a specific, form of love that is distinct from romantic love or (*eros*) or friendly (*philia*) love. While modern English often uses "love" to describe a feeling or emotional attraction, *agape* is defined in Christian theology as a selfless, intentional, and sacrificial, deliberate act of will.

To understand why Paul writes these famous words, we have to look at the mess he was trying to clean up in Corinth. The Corinthian church was exciting, dynamic, and utterly chaotic. They were obsessed with spiritual status symbols: tongues, prophecy, and deep theological knowledge. They measured their closeness to God by the spectacular nature of their displays. Paul tells them, “*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*” (1 Cor. 13:2). He continues in verse 3, “*And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor; and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*”

Paul does not dismiss spiritual gifts in these passages, but he completely subverts their value system. In scripture, he places 1 Corinthians 13 right between two chapters that detail how a church should function. He focuses on what

attributes are more important than merely adding up achievements to attain spiritual greatness. In this chapter, he shows them a better way; the quiet, everyday work of giving yourself and your love to others.

In our Anglican tradition, we might not struggle with the chaotic utterances of ancient Corinth, but we can easily fall into our own version of this trap. We can substitute churchmanship, liturgical precision, faithful attendance, or doctrinal correctness for the actual practice of charity. Paul's warning cuts through time and is equally relevant now than it was in ancient Corinth. We can have the right vestments, follow the prayer book to the letter, and have a wonderful spectacle of how we present church, but if we do not have charity (or agape), we are nothing.

Notice that Paul does not define charity by how it feels, but by how it acts. In modern English, the word "love" has been diluted into a sentiment, a warm feeling, or an involuntary emotion. But Christian love (*agape*) is a disposition of the will. It is a choice of action, a choice of behavior. Paul does not define love by how it makes one feel. Instead, he describes what love does. In verses 4-8, Paul gives us a rundown of how charity or love should be. *“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, It Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth:*

but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; (1 Cor. 13:4-8)

Paul writes that these are choices of conduct, acts of the will, rather than involuntary emotions. *Agape* is the decision to seek the well-being of others, even when you do not feel like it or when the recipient is not “worthy” of it. Charity has a long fuse; it refuses to retaliate when there is a perceived slight or misunderstanding. It does not envy, is not arrogant or “puffed up. It does not view life as a competitive sport. It does not need to be the center of attention or the smartest person in the room. This type of love has good manners born of deep humility. It does not demand its rights or rejoice in inequity. Instead, this love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, This love never fails.

Consider how these descriptions act as a mirror during our Morning Prayer service today. When we say the General Confession, admitting we have "offended against thy holy laws," this chapter shows us all the places where we fell short this week. We can ask ourselves, was I short tempered? Did I insist on my own way? Did I keep a mental tally of every wrong that was done to me? Paul's list is not a romantic poem to be read exclusively at weddings; it is a checklist for Christian maturity.

This brings us to the beautiful internal logic of today's Collect. Today we prayed that God would govern those whom He brings up in His *"steadfast fear and love."* And to *"keep us under the protection of thy good providence, and to make us have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name"* There is a profound connection between being "brought up" by God and the maturity Paul speaks of at the end of our text: *"When I was a child, I spake as a child... but when I became a man, I put away childish things."* (1 Cor 13:11).

This verse from 1 Corinthians is understood as a profound commentary on spiritual maturity and the pilgrimage of the Christian life. It is not merely a statement about growing older, but a description of the transition from a self-centered faith to a God-centered one. Childish religion is transactional and self-absorbed. A child, who lacks maturity or wisdom, looks to a parent merely for what they can get out of them. Like a child who interacts with a parent primarily to get toys, snacks, or approval, the "childish" Christian approaches God seeking only comfort, miracles, or the avoidance of punishment or accountability. "Putting away childish things" means moving toward a faith that loves God for who He is, rather than for what He provides. It is the transition from "God, give me what I want" or "my will be done" to "God, thy will be done." It is a move from the comforts of religion to a focus on service within the Kingdom. As God "brings us up" in His

grace, our faith matures. We move from the childish preoccupation with our own performance to a quiet, steadfast awe, and a "steadfast fear and love" in God.

True charity is the mark of spiritual adulthood. It is the realization that knowledge will vanish away, our accolades and accomplishments will eventually dissolve, and all we create and build will fade. What remains when all of this type of worldly focus is stripped away? *Faith, hope, and charity—and the greatest of these is charity. (v.13)*

Action/Conclusion

Today, on our culture, how do we love this way? We cannot simply wake up tomorrow and try harder to be patient and kind; our willpower is fragile and this type of behavior change rarely lasts. The secret of 1 Corinthians 13 is that these verses are ultimately a portrait of Jesus Christ. If you want to know what this love looks like, replace the word "charity" with the name of "Jesus": *Jesus suffereth long, and is kind; Jesus envieth not; Jesus seeketh not his own; Jesus never faileth.* Put your faith and focus on Him and receive and give this type of love.

As we go forth from our Morning Prayer service today, having heard His Word, confessed our sins, and offered up our praises, let us ask the Holy Spirit to pour that very love into our hearts. May we be kept under the protection of His good providence, so that our lives outside these walls may not be a clanging

cymbal, but a beautiful representation of the love we have received from Christ.

May we lead our lives in service of others, in love for our neighbors, and in honoring and loving God.

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen