

## **Annual Meeting February 3, 2019**

### **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

We are in the midst of the second year of our Capital Campaign- Growing to Give with our emphasis on growing in love to one another.

The text we've focused on this year is from the last supper in John, where Jesus gives a new commandment to his disciples to "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another." That love, in Greek, is *agape*. It is a different kind of love from the romantic love of a couple, the love that is found in a family, or in a deep friendship. *Agape* is an other centered, self-sacrificing kind of love. It is most associated with Jesus.

That is the kind of love described in our text today. This chapter from Paul comes right after one on spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church is in conflict with one another. Some are lording it over the others because they believe their spiritual gifts are better than the ones those people have. Therefore, they are more important than those others. Paul counteracts this with his description of the need for all the gifts to be present for the body to function. He also puts spiritual gifts in their right relationship with what Paul says is the most important thing. Love. The word for love here is our word for love- *agape*- and it is this love that is being mentioned throughout the text.

It is instructive to note that the words Paul uses here are not adjectives (descriptive words), they are verbs...action words. Paul is describing what love

does...not what it is. Of the 15 words that are used for this description; Seven are about what love does and the balance about what love does not do.

What this gets at is that this kind of love, *agape*, that we are to have with one another is not a feeling, it is an action...always moving in relation to another.

Love is not the act of desiring what another has, showing off for others, puffing ourselves up, acting in an unseemly way. Love is not insisting on our way, easily provoked. It does not keep an account of the wrongs others have done to us, nor does it rejoice in injustice. Rather, love is being long tempered, it is being kind to one another. Love rejoices in the truth (which according to John is Jesus!), it bears up under heavy loads, it endures all challenges, it trusts. Love does not have an end point, a moment at which it does not love anymore.

This is what we are in the midst of striving in this year.

I know that I have seen this kind of love active in you all as individual members of this body. It is in the care neighbors gave to Pat, Brad, and Jessica on the death of their mother/wife, their uncle/brother within 24 hours of each other. In the group that cared for a sick friend with no family around. It is in the patience you show the people who frustrate you most.

There has also been plenty of ways we have shown that love to our neighbors, together. In the VBS we offer to our community and the Community Food Drive, the Souper Bowl of Caring, the gifts given to disaster relief for fires and hurricanes in the past year. It is in the way we treat each other with respect and care, even when someone here really ticks us off (you know it happens).

But what are the ways in which you need to continue to grow in this love? Where do you need to be more-long tempered? Where do you need to tear up that list of wrongs someone has done to you?

Where do you need to re-engage with someone so this agape love does not end? Where do we as a community need to grow in our own love for one another and for those who we live among?

The only way we can grow in this love, is by first receiving it. For it is Christ who models this love for us. A love that claimed you, unworthy that you are. That drowned the old, selfish, grumpy, critical you and that raised up a new person, one who could begin to love others with agape. We receive, we experience that love when we assemble together around Word and sacrament. When we are reminded of the story of God's pursuit of us, his beloved. Of how God sent God's own Son into this world so that we might no longer be enslaved to things other than love. That we might taste in bread and wine the forgiveness and mercy of God and be filled and inspired to go forth and show even a fraction of that to those around us.

I give thanks to God for each of you and the ways in which you have grown over the last year, in faith and in love. I give thanks to God that God continues to work through us and on us, so that we might continue to grow in that love. So that God's mercy and forgiveness might be experienced by all our neighbors as we live our daily lives and as we work together in this particular Body of Christ that is St. John. May we receive the courage and boldness to always sing the story of the love of God found in Jesus Christ, and to invite others to join us in that story.