

The Greatest is Love

Sermon July 17, 2022

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 and Luke 10:25-37

Golden Verse: *“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”* (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Today, let us focus on these words: “The greatest is love”.

The greatest thing a person can give to another person, whether as a parent to a child, a child to a grandparent, a person to a partner, sibling to sibling, friend to a friend, is love! Love is the spirit of a healthy life. Just as anger and hatred kill reality, so love gives life!

Even animals show that love gives life. An experiment was performed with a small pair of goats. One of the little goats went with the mother goat in the field and the other was kept in a barn. They gave her everything she needed but she was released to be around her mother only for short periods when it was time for the mother goat to feed her. The goat, which spent all her time around her mother, day and night, developed beautifully and was always very healthy, cheerful, and jubilant. However, the other one became more and more depressed, until it died. The experiment was repeated with other animals and the result was the same. Although they got all the vitamins in their food, they did not receive LOVE. There was no sickness in their bodies, but they were depressed because LOVE was withdrawn. The goat was not sick, yet she perished.

I watched quite a few movies about people who did not receive enough love and sought attention in a very negative way. Their lives went downhill, and they ended up joining bad groups and committing crimes. Waking up in a jail cell was the result for some of these people. Most of them had hardworking parents, but they were too busy to give them LOVE.

Why did one of those goats die? Because she didn't get maternal love!

Why did some people end up committing crimes? The parents gave them everything but love!

Love is the number one vitamin that human nature can never do without. Experts say the work of criminal judges would fall back to about one-fifth if all people

were given love. It seems that, in our society, the most important life force is missing: love.

Love is more important than how much education or what kind of degree we get. The most important thing is how much love we get and how much we give. Because “love is the greatest”!

If it is true that the greatest thing one man can give to another is love, then it follows that the greatest mistake is not to give love. How often do we still fail to love one another? This is the most painful accusation against us with the parable of the Good Samaritan. WE DON'T GIVE ENOUGH LOVE.

In our story, the priest and Levite did not commit any evil against this person who was beaten up and thrown in the ditch.

Both the priest and Levite were in a big hurry, on their way to the temple to worship God and serve the congregation. They did not want to touch that needy person thrown in the ditch because, based on Moses' law, they would be considered “unclean”, and they would not be able to participate in the church service. So, they stayed away from this bleeding person who desperately needed help. They wanted to fulfill Moses' law by not touching another person's wounds and not messing their hands with somebody's dirty laundry and blood. But according to Jesus, they both failed TO LOVE their neighbour and, according to Jesus' judgment, that was awful!

“The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm” (1 Timothy 1:5-7).

It is so upsetting to see that we all fail daily to LOVE. We fail to LOVE our family at home. We fail to love our colleagues. We fail to love our Christian fellows here at church. Because we fail to love, our society and our small world feel cold and distant, marriage gets miserable, parents and children become estranged from each other, and life becomes difficult. Yet, in fact, no active evil has happened yet, only the greatest was missing: love.

If that priest or Levite was to defend himself by saying: “I didn't hurt him, I didn't touch him with a finger ...” Jesus might have told him: this is your sin, this is

negative behaviour. If that victim would die in the ditch because of his bleeding, he would die because two so-called “great believers” did not touch him or show mercy. What a silly excuse they would have in front of the judgment throne sharing their excuse with God, saying: Lord, I avoided paying special attention to that needy man, I excluded that person from my life, I let that person die because I obeyed the law, and on my way to the church I did not want to be called “unclean” by touching somebody’s wounds.

There are so many exclusions today, even amongst Christians. Those who call themselves LAWFUL Christians, according to the law-respecting approach, are excluding loving Christians from the pews, although the top of Jesus' law is acceptance and love. Not only did the robbers harm the Samaritan fellow but those, too, who did not touch their fellow neighbour.

Jesus’ last commandment was to love one another. Those who call themselves Christian, who do not hate anyone but do not love either because they are indifferent to others, hurt the law of Christ. We can physically beat the other person to death. But we can also kill them as we neglect them, leaving them alone in their wounds with their sadness and trouble.

Love is “the greatest”. Without love, life is no life. Without love, the world becomes hell because hell is nothing but an eternal life without love.

The greatest is love! But not just any kind of love! Because in our days, even the word love in many ways is devalued. It is used for so many things that sometimes it is almost embarrassing. So what is REAL LOVE? I love strudel, I love the Hungarian chicken soup as my wife prepares it, I love hockey, I love the beach, I love sunsets.... Many different feelings are in us as we use the word LOVE. Love is the foundation of relationships: the deepest roots of parental bonding, the way we interact with our friends and the way we experience God.

The problem is that we still only understand this word according to Greek philosophical thinking. According to Plato, the essence of love is admiration and longing. For example, a young man admires the beauty of a girl and longs for her, so he loves her. Of course, we cannot love the enemy in the same way.

However, Jesus takes the root of love deeper. For Jesus, love is not longing and admiration, but a willingness to serve and sacrifice. So the root of all kinds of love

is much deeper than the rippling of our emotional life or our mood. Love is the root of that great ability to serve and sacrifice. That is why love is directly commanded by Jesus. Love your neighbour ... love even your enemy! This does not mean that we should admire our enemy as we admire our own little child or yearn for them as lovers are longing after one another, but it means that we should be ready to serve and sacrifice, even for our enemy.

This kind of love is the greatest! It is the foundation, the root of everything we call love: parental love, friendship, collegiality, love for God. Without love, the world becomes unbearable.

If we are honest with ourselves, we have to state that this type of love is completely missing from us. Our love is a “cheap love.” We love only our friends who are good to us and if we profit from them. We love someone when and if we value them or when they pay our love in return. This is cheap love. It costs nothing to us to love: no sacrifice, no self-denial. We can produce only this type of love.

The other, the “most precious” love, and what Jesus encourages us to show and practice, is not an earthly product; it does not grow here. That love needs to be imported from above because that is the love of God. God already brought this Love to us from heaven in His son Jesus Christ. When Mary and Joseph laid the child of Bethlehem in the manger, this love became flesh there. Jesus’ whole life was the greatest service and sacrifice. He embodied the love that is full of service and sacrifice for the benefit of the unworthy, the sinners, and the enemies. Every drop of blood that was shed there on the cross and fell into the dust of Golgotha was His infinite love. Jesus brought to earth the greatest, the most important LOVE. Without His love, we cannot live forever.

I am inviting you now to truly rejoice that God loves you so much in Jesus Christ that He gave Jesus to die for you on the cross. If you can embrace and incorporate Jesus’s love, you won’t find it hard to love even your enemies, and to follow the commandment to “*Love one another as I have loved you.*” (John 15:12) He who lives by this precious love of God, called Jesus, will learn to love everybody and will not exclude anybody. Only those who never embraced Jesus as their Saviour will continue to exclude. Come and be happy that you can give something to others because you experienced that God loves you. He is blessing you in an enormous way, and you are receiving His grace and His love daily and abundantly. Amen