

**If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> 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 have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.**

**<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

**<sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. <sup>12</sup> Now we see but a poor 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.**

**<sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (NIV84)**

Theme: Spiritual Maturity Starts with Love.

“You need to grow up.” Has anyone ever said that to you? Have you ever said or thought that about someone else? You might tell someone to grow up if they do something immature—stupid or say something foolish and think it is funny. Often when someone matures they look back at what they at one time thought was funny, or good and right, and they realize that they were wrong; they often come to the realization that there is a better way to go about things. And we also realize that everyone matures at different times—that is true whether you are talking about physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually

No one wants to be married to someone who is immature. No one wants to be married to someone who acts like a teenager! Everyone hopes that their spouse is trustworthy, knowledgeable, devoted, and

driven. No one wants to be married to self-absorbed slacker, who doesn't care about anything especially other people. He will do just about anything to avoid working hard or making his marriage better. You might say about this type of person that he needs to grow up—he needs to mature.

Why bring up marriage? Because these words of 1 Corinthians 13, especially verses 4-7 often are read during weddings and many couples often pick them for the text of the sermon. People think that these verses give us a beautiful description of a God-pleasing marriage, that is shows us what every marriage should strive to be. “Those are just such beautiful words” you might hear a mother-in-law say as she leaves the wedding. But these words weren't meant for a husband and wife—but for brothers and sisters in faith. They are not to be a beautiful description of what a marriage should be; with these words Paul is describing how a spiritual mature Christian deals with other Christians. They show us how we are to live our lives as mature Christians.

The Corinthian congregation was a unique one. Paul founded the congregation during his second missionary journey. He had stayed there preaching the gospel and teaching the people for about a year and a half. Perhaps about three and a half years later, while he was staying in Ephesus, Paul got word of some problems that the Corinthian congregation was facing, and so he wrote them this first letter.

They were a young congregation; but a congregation that was greatly blessed by the Lord. At the time, the Holy Spirit had given many special gifts to the Corinthian Christians. To some, God had given wisdom; others had a special knowledge of God's Word. Others were given the gift of prophecy and still others had the gift of speaking in tongues. These were great gifts from the Lord; but the problem is that many of them thought that whatever gift they had was greater than the gifts anyone else had. They also consider themselves better than other Christians who didn't have these special gifts given to them. Soon arguments and divisions in the Church happened. You could say that the church was full of spiritually gifted and yet immature Christians. Here's Paul's point: Love wins out—it trumps all. Out of all the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit could have given them—whether it is prophecy, or knowledge, or speaking in tongues—none of them are as important as the gift of love.

If you were given a direct revelation from God himself, prophesying using the very words of God, but you don't do it with love, it doesn't matter. If you know more about God's Word than anyone else, or have a stronger faith than anyone you know—but you don't have love for God and for others, then you are nothing in the eyes of God. Even if you were given that gift of speaking in tongues, or speaking the language of angels, if you do not have love, you might as well be banging on a drum—just making a bunch of nonsense noise.

So if love trumps all and if no other spiritual gift matters if it is not done in love, then we should talk about what love is. What exactly is love? Many people think of love as a feeling or an emotion. Some sort of sentimental feeling, or the warm fuzzies when you get around someone you really, really like. In the view of many, love has to do with attraction and passion.

But that is not the biblical definition of love at all. Paul describes what love is in those verses you hear at so many weddings. In this description of love Paul lists two things that love is, then eight that it isn't, and then finally, he lists four things that love does.

First off we see that **love is patient**, not becoming angry and upset when someone does something you don't like. **Love is kind**—not only having a sweet disposition but also being helpful, friendly, and useful. **Love is not jealous**. We don't get upset at the successes, possessions, or blessings of others, but we are happy for others. **Love does not boast or brag** about what you have accomplished at the expense of someone else. It is not proud, that is, it doesn't arrogantly think that it is better than others. **Love is not rude**, that is, it doesn't behave indecently; but does what is right. **It is not self-seeking**, instead it looks for what is good for others. **Love does not get easily angered**. **Love keeps no record of wrongs** (literally: love does not consider the evil). That is, it doesn't take into the account the sinful and evil things people have done to you. **Instead of finding joy in what is evil, wicked, and sinful, love delights in all that is true, good and right**. **It Always protects** and covers over the sins and mistakes of others instead of calling people out in front of others so that they may be humiliated. **Love for God trusts all that he says**. **Love for others trusts** what is said, not doubting what they have to say or being skeptical of them. **Finally, love also perseveres, or endures, all**

**things**, when all else fails and when everything else is God, love remains.

We can see, then, that love isn't really a feeling or an emotion. Love is an action—or perhaps you can say love is an attitude that leads to do nice things for others—it affects how you treat others and deal with them on a regular basis.

So apply this to your lives—especially as it pertains to how you deal with God's children here at Holy Cross. Although no one here is a prophet and none of us are able to speak in tongues, we all have different gifts and abilities given to us by the Lord. Some of us may even excel at certain things. And we are to all use our gifts and abilities for God and his Church. But it doesn't matter what gifts you have—and it doesn't matter how much you use those gifts if you don't do it with love. It doesn't matter how much you know of God's Word, you could give 25 grand in offerings each year, you could be the one who volunteers all of your time here at Church; but if it's not done out of love for Christ and love for his other children, it doesn't matter one bit.

We see that the kind of love Paul describes here—the love that Christ has for the world and the love that Christians have for each other. It is also clear as we look at this definition of love that we don't come close to loving each other this way—and sadly, we'll probably never come close. These verses cause us to hang our head in shame knowing how many times we have failed to love in such a way.

But you can't really talk about love without thinking about Christ and his love. It is love that led Christ to take on flesh and live on this earth as one of us—God taking on mortal flesh. It was love that led him to take our sins upon himself and suffer through the eternal punishment that we deserved as he was forsaken by the Father. Love led Christ to give us his perfect life so that we would be pure and innocent in the eyes of the Lord. And it was love that led him to give up his life, breathing his last and giving up his spirit. But it was also with love that he rose from the dead, winning the ultimate victory and giving that victory to us!

2. Paul talks about this love that God has for us in Romans 5, **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us**. John reiterates this thought in his first letter, **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and**

**sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** Do you see what true love is—an action of Christ, which saves us!

What does Christ's love mean for us? It means that he doesn't count our sins against us. All the times we have failed to show love to others, all the times that we have boasted about our gifts or complained about the lack of gifts or volunteering of others. For all the times that we have sinned against the Lord and failed to show love to him and his children because we were selfish, prideful, and arrogant, we are forgiven.

Christ has paid for all of those sins. He has removed all our wrongs and done away with our offenses. We stand forgiven before him. By his grace—his undeserved love for us, God had declared us not guilty on account of his son. His love for us means that we won't be condemned for our sins but we will live with him in heaven forever. And there in heaven our spiritual gifts will be complete. We'll have a complete understanding and knowledge of God and his Word. There is already no need for the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues. All those spiritual gifts don't and won't last—the spiritual gift that remains in heaven? Love.

Paul ends our chapter by saying, **now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.** Faith and hope have to do with God; and so they are obviously important. But here Paul isn't talking about our relationship with God, he is talking about how we deal with others. So in that respect love is the greatest, for it is love by which we treat others as God treated us, **for we love because he first loved us.**

And so we grow up—spiritually. And this begins and continues by showing love to others. It is childish and immature to think you are better than someone else, to think that you have better gifts given to you from God; or to look down upon others. The truth is that we all we all have different gifts and abilities and the use of those gifts and abilities work in perfect harmony together for God and his Church. And in love we recognize that. And we also recognize that love is a gift that God has given all Christians. And so we live a life of love, showing love to others just as Christ loved us. So that we can all grow up in Christ and mature spiritually—not just in love but in all things in Christ. Amen.