**5th Sunday of Easter – Year C – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on 1Corinthians 13:1-13 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**What is love?**

**I. God is love**

**II. We will love**

***1*** *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.* ***2*** *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.* ***3*** *If I give all I possess to the poor* *and surrender my body to the flames,* *but have not love, I gain nothing.* ***4*** *Love is patient,* *love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.****5*** *It is not rude, it is not self-seeking,* *it is not easily angered,* *it keeps no record of wrongs.****6*** *Love does not delight in evil* *but rejoices with the truth.****7*** *It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.****8*** *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.* ***9*** *For we know in part* *and we prophesy in part,* ***10*** *but when perfection comes,* *the imperfect disappears.* ***11*** *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.* ***12*** *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.****13*** *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.* *But the greatest of these is love.*

Spring is in the air, when a young man’s fancy turns to thoughts of love and marriage, when couples approach their pastor and ask, “We want you to marry us!” And I reply, “That’s great! Since Lord is the one who established the blessing of marriage, and you’re asking the Lord to bless this wedding ceremony in the church, let’s sit down and see what he says about marriage.” I will take the couple through pre-marriage counseling, and the first question I ask, “Why do you want to get married?” They usually look at me funny, then gaze into each other’s eyes and say, “Because we love each other.” Then I ask, “What do you mean by that?” And again they stare at me like I’m crazy. They may say something like, “Well… love is patient, love is kind, it is not easily angered, it always perseveres, the greatest is love!” and then I have to break the bad news to them and tell them that this passage from 1Corinthians 13 is not talking about marriage. It really has nothing to do with hubands and wives. In fact, this text actually talks about the love between brothers and sisters in Christ, church members, believers, and the love they will show to each other in their attitudes and words and actions.

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to Christians in the city of Corinth, located near the Aegean Sea in southern Greece. In chapter 12 the apostle talked about spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to every Christian. He reminded the Corinthians that not every Christian will possess every spiritual gift. Christians work together, just like the human body. The eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, feet are all necessary, but cannot work independently of each other. They must work together. Christians use their spiritual gifts and talents to work together. The gifts of teaching, preaching, praying, wisdom, giving, hospitality, knowledge and encouragement, we use these gifts to serve each other. We use these gifts to reach out to the unchurched.

Then Paul says, “**And now I will show you the most excellent way.”** The most excellent way to use our spiritual gifts is in love. What kind of love is this? The Greek language uses different words to describe different types of love. There’s the love between a husband and wife, sexual love. There’s love between good friends. There’s love for family. Then there’s the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* love seeks the welfare of others who are completely unworthy of any kindness and mercy. It is unconditional love. It is love that goes beyond feelings. Even when our emotions tell us they do not deserve our love, we love them anyway.

This is the word that describes the love God has for you and me**. “For God so loved the world,”** with agape love. God looked at the sinful human race, how corrupt and vile, full of perversion and rebellion, and lust and greed, and he loved them anyway. He put that love into action by sending his Son, his only Son, Jesus. Paul wrote in Romans, **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** (Romans 5:8) That’s the kind of love God has for us. That’s the kind of love he commands, yes, demands from us. Paul explains what this love looks like in action among Christian brothers and sisters.

**“Love is patient.”** Patient is a word that means it takes a long time before you begin to fume and burn with fire. Are you always patient with the parents who try to teach their children how to sit in church, and parents are you always patient with the members who turn around and make faces when your child makes noise? Are you patient with your fellow church members who are not registered with the same political party as you? Are you patient with your brothers and sisters who may not do ministry the way you did ministry when you were growing up? Are you always patient with your spouse, with your children, with your parents?

**“Love is kind.”** It means to be useful and beneficial. Are your words always beneficial for your brothers and sisters who hear them?

**“Love does not envy.”** Are you always content with the gifts you have, or have you been envious of what others have?

**“Love does not boast, it is not proud.”** The word means to puff yourself up like a hot air balloon. Do you build up others and their accomplishments, or brag about your successes?

**“Love is not rude.”** There are different ways of showing you may not have the same opinion as someone else, when you share your opinion, does it show respect for the feelings of others?

**“Love is not self-seeking.”** Love always seeks the welfare of others, or is life always about me and what’s convenient for me?

**“Love is not easily angered.”** It doesn’t flare up every time our pride is hurt, every time someone offers some constructive criticism. How well do you take criticism? Lovingly? Not easily angered?

**“Love keeps no record of wrongs.”** It doesn’t keep score of all the bad things he said to me or the times she hurt me, so I can be sure to bring them up again at the proper time and remind them of their sins.

**“Love one another as I have loved you,”** Jesus commanded. You haven’t done that, have you? Neither have I. This was suppose to be a lovey-dovey section of Scripture and marriage, because it talks about love, right? Sounds more like my failure to love the way God wants me to.

When the Bible says that God is love, it’s hard for me to understand why God would love the world, when it is full of unlovable people, people who hate, and are prideful, and selfish and self-centered, people who are unwilling to work together, unwilling to forgive and exercise patience, unwilling to endure criticism, people like me, unworthy of divine love.

But when I go back and read this section again, I realize that it isn’t talking about my love for others. This chapter really describes God’s perfect love, doesn’t it? This chapter gives an accurate description of God and his *agape* love for you and me.

God is love. **Love is patient**. God is patient, as the Apostle Peter wrote, **“He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”** (2Peter 3:9) He wants everyone to be saved. Thank God that he brought me to faith through Holy Baptism and saved me through Christ’s blood, shed for my sins. Since he has brought us to faith we will not perish but have everlasting life.

**Love is not easily angered.** God is no longer angry with us, as King David wrote in the Psalms, **“The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities.”** (Ps 103:8-10) God directed all of his anger at his Son, Jesus on the cross, and now showers you with his love.

**Love is not self-seeking**. Jesus did not look to gain anything for himself by going to the cross. He went to die. People don’t willing go to death to gain anything. Jesus went to the cross for you, so that you might benefit from his death. The blessing you receive through faith is that you stand before God forgiven, at peace, with a clear conscience.

**Love keeps no record of wrongs**. You might think that the Almighty, omniscient, all-knowing God, would always remember each unloving word and action and thought from me. But he is love, his love promised you, Isaiah 43:25, **“I am he who blots out your transgressions, and remembers your sins no more.”** He can do that, we cannot, because he is love.

**Love always protects.** His love covers us and shelters us, so we have confidence in life and in death, as Paul wrote, **“I am convinced that neither life nor death, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 8:38-39) You are safe in Jesus’ love.

Jesus now commands you, **“Love each other as I have loved you.”** This is the way you will love each other, with *agape* love. Because this is who you are in Christ Jesus. You are loving people. Love, *agape* love, wants to imitate the love Jesus has for you. *Agape* love seeks to love your brothers and sisters in Christ, even when you don’t think they deserve it, but then you remember, you were not deserving of God’s love, and he loved you anyway.

**Love is patient**, with parents and children in church, it is patient with those who do not share our political platform, it is patient at voters’ meetings and council meetings, women of faith meetings. **Love is kind**, it says kind things to each other. L**ove does not envy**, it is content with what I have and thanks God for what the blessings he has given others. **Love does not boast, it is not proud**, instead it is humble. **Love is not rude**, but tactful. It speaks the truth in a loving way**. Love is not self-seeking**, but seeks the welfare of others. **Love is not easily angered**, it accepts criticism humbly and seeks to find out if maybe there’s some truth in what people are saying to me. **It keeps no record of wrongs.** Love does not say, “I will forgive, but I cannot forget!” Love says, “I will forgive… and forget… and move on.” **It always protects**, love is the support, the roof, that covers over the individual who is being drenched in the thunderstorm of life. That roof is the word of encouragement from God’s Word you share with someone. **Love always trusts**, it believes, it trusts God’s promise to bless us when we love. **Love always hopes**, love always puts the best construction on other’s motives, and trusts that they are pure motives. **Love always perseveres**, it is indefatigable, it has the capacity to endure despite ingratitude and bad conduct that comes when we live and work together in a church and in a home, and we do all this without complaining, without becoming discouraged.

And then Paul says, Vs13, **“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”** Paul is saying that faith, hope and love will continue and remain through eternity. In heaven we will have faith. We will continue to trust in the Triune God who planned and carried out our salvation. We will trust that he will continue to bless us for all eternity in heaven. We will still have hope in heaven, not some uncertain wish, but a certain confidence that we will constantly seek new joys and new treasures in heaven. There will be love in heaven, God’s love for us and our love for each other.

But the greatest is love. What does that even mean? We’re not exactly sure. Paul doesn’t explain it and the context doesn’t even tell us. But when we look at the other sections of Scripture we know that God is love. Love is his greatest gift to us. Love moved him to send his Son Jesus. Without his love, he would not have given us the gift of faith to believe. Without his love, we would not have the sure certainty of heaven. Without God’s love revealed through Jesus, we would not know how to live as a Christian.

I pray that this sermon on 1Corinthians 13 gives you a better understand of this much misused and misquoted section of Scripture – that it is not about marriage or wedding days. This chapter is really an excellent description of God’s love for you, and how his love strengthens you to love each other in the same way.

It is my prayer that you continue to plumb the depths of God’s love in his Word and that his love will move you to love as he loved you. Amen.