

“Love is the greatest gift that God has given to us”!
1 Corinthians 13:13

This morning with God’s help we will meditate in the thirteen verse of chapter 13 from 1 Corinthians. Let us hear this verse: **“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”** Here ends the text for meditation. Let us begin this meditation from 1 Corinthians 13, in the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

+++++

Dear friends in Christ:

I love you. Who among us has not said and heard those words before? It fills a parent's heart with joy to hear their children say, “I love you dad, or I love you mom”. And hearing those words from their parents means a lot to children, too. A young man and woman, who are just discovering a bond between them might say those words to each other. And, of course, husbands and wives tell each other; I love you.

Love is something very important to us. Poets and novelists have written countless words describing love, or mourning its loss. Love is a major theme in music, in drama, in television. One songwriter tells us that love is a many splendored thing, while another says, what the world needs now is love, sweet love. And they are both right.

Love is something wonderful and everyone wants, and needs, to be loved. Without love, our lives would be empty and lonely. Without love, life would be bitter and unappealing. People have died from a lack or loss of love; we would say they died from a broken heart. On the other hand, how many heroic deeds or tragic crimes of passion have been committed, all in the name of love? Love is something special. In fact, St. Paul tells us today that love is the greatest gift that God has given to us. He even ranks love above faith and hope, and that is saying a lot. Love is a key ingredient in our relationships with one another, and it is a key part of our life with God. And because it is so important, love should be something special in our lives as God's people.

It is good to have faith, and it is good to have hope. But even greater than these is love; love which brings it all together; love which should be seen in all its splendour, in all our dealings with one another and in our relationship with God. Faith, hope, and love. These three things are mentioned together many times in the New Testament as key ingredients of a Christian life and identity. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul says “we continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” To the Colossians, Paul said “we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven.”

Faith, hope and love have been called the three greatest Christian virtues. In a very real sense, these are the three things that make a Christian a Christian. Paul tells us in our text that these three remain, that they will last forever. But the real hook is the last part of that verse: But the greatest of these is love.

For Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to tell us that love is greater than faith and greater than hope really shows how important love is for our lives. After all, we normally think of faith as all important. Scripture says: “it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith.” We are also told that the righteous shall live by faith, and that without faith, it is impossible to please God. The scriptural truth that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone is the chief part of our confession as a church.

But as great as faith is, love is greater. And what about hope? Hope looks ahead to all the glory that waits for us in heaven a glory that is greater than anything we can imagine. Peter talks about the living hope that we have through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul says we rejoice in hope, and that hope does not disappoint. Christian hope is a wonderful thing. And yet love is greater than hope.

What is it that makes love so special? For one thing, love is the tie that binds. Love brings us together and helps us to live in peace and harmony with one another, as we are forgiving toward one another, concerned about one another, and supportive of one another. Love is important as the summary of all God's law, for we are to love God with all our heart and mind and soul, and we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. Love is special because it gives meaning to Christian faith and hope. Love is the guiding influence behind our use of all God's gifts, and it motivates us to use those gifts for the good of others.

Paul says "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. 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. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Friends, without love, even faith and hope are empty and valueless.

But what really makes love special is the fact that love alone makes us like God. We know how great God's love is. God is love and He loves all people, even the unlovable, even the worst of sinners. Because He loves us, God is concerned about everything that affects or troubles us in any way. His love is so great, that He even cares enough to keep track of the very hairs on our head. And His love works for our salvation.

It is love that motivates Christ to leave His heavenly home to take on human flesh and blood. It was love that moved Him to help those who came to Him; the blind, the lame, the distressed. It was love that led Him to the cross, to die in our place, to take upon Himself the punishment that we deserve. It was love that moved Him to rise again, and it is love that leads Him to work for our good each and every day. And we can be sure that His love will never fail, that in all things, at all times, God is love, and deals with us in love.

The greatness of love is that it brings us into the fullest union and communion with God. And because He does love us, we can be loving people, loving as God loves us. St. John says "Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." God loves us that is a wonderful thing. And if we would be like Him, then love must be something active and alive in us.

But is it? Is love the greatest thing in our life? Love should be evident in the way that husbands and wives treat each other, considering their spouse to be the most important thing in their lives after God Himself. Children should show love in their obedience and respect for their parents, their teachers, and all those in authority. Love should show itself in the way we deal with one another that we are honest with one another, that we care about one another, and that we are forgiving towards each other.

In the King James Version, the word charity is used in the place of love and that is a very important aspect of love. Love is concerned with the needs of people around us, just as Jesus was and there is no shortage of people in need of our love. But can the greatness of love be seen in our lives?

A little while ago I read an article, entitled: Do you have a loving church? In that article are ten questions designed to help us ask ourselves, how loving are we? Let me ask those questions now and keep track of the number of "yes" answers you can give.

1. In the last week, have you intentionally done something loving or caring for at least two people?
2. In the last week, have you prayed for someone outside your immediate family?
3. In the last week, have you said, I love you, or hugged someone?
4. In the last two weeks, have you contacted another church member who needed encouragement?
5. When you are in a group of people and someone asks for help, do you usually volunteer?
6. In the last month, have any of your work or school associates called on you for help; outside of your normal relationship?

7. In the last month, have you done a loving/caring act anonymously?
8. In the last month, have you taken the initiative to say, I am sorry, to restore a strained relationship?
9. Can you recall a significant sacrifice you have made in the last three months to help someone in need?
10. In the last six months, have you forgiven someone who has done wrong to you?

If you could say yes to 5 out of those ten statements, then you are a person who is learning the greatness of love. And I am sure that we can all see that no matter how loving we may be, we still have a long way to go before we truly love, as God has loved us. And what a difference love makes for our lives, and for our world! It has been said that there is no power in the world greater than love, and that love makes the world go round. We would not want to live in a world without love, and we would not want to live without love. Then let us live in faith, hope and love and may we always remember that the greatest of these is love, as love unites us with our God and gives of itself as He has given to us. Amen.