

How to Be a Better Lover

4th Sun. after Epiphany – 01/30/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 12:31b, [Paul says,] **“I will show you a still more excellent way”**.

v. 11, **“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.”**

Introduction

✘ Here it is in our Epistle Reading today - St. Paul's famous “love talk”, with its most famous verse – verse 13, “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love”. Many couples choose these words for their wedding day? Why? because “it paints the picture of perfect love for the perfect marriage”. Almost every couple enters into their wedding believing that they've got – that perfect love! But for those who have been, or are married, how did that work out for you? It may be great, but honestly – is it perfect?

➔ There was a young man who went off to college. At every break, he brought home a different girlfriend. This amused his father. But every time, his mother issued a critical remark, “Son, she's beautiful. But, is she perhaps a little too somber?” Or with the next, “I don't know. She's so particular”. And then with another, “She sure strikes me as too mousy for you, my dear”.

➔ At last her son brought home a splendid woman. So bubbly, brash and bright! He began to think, “No wonder I'm head over heels. She's just like Mom!” And what did Mom think? Oh, she was thrilled, “You found the perfect girl”.

➔ But wouldn't you know it? His father took his son aside. “Son, I have always kept my opinion to myself. As long as you're happy, I will love this girl. But, I can't put my finger on it: there's just something about her that I don't like, and frankly she scares me to death!”

✘ Well, folks, I must confess. I still have much more to learn about the ways of love. How about you? How many of us here wouldn't admit that there are times we could be more lovable? Times we should be more loving?

➔ Then this is God's text for us all today. He says to his friends in Corinth and right here in Ft. Lupton, “I will show you a still more excellent way” (v.31). Just as the sermon title teases, Paul shows you and me “How to be a Better Lover!” – whether you are married or not; old or young.

I. What more do you need to be a better lover?

✘ So, complete this sentence to yourself, “I would love the people in my life better, if only ...” What? What would it take? To be honest, I wonder if Paul isn't answering that question for himself in verses 1-3. Maybe that's why he starts each sentence with the word “if”. **“If** I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And **if** I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and **if** I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. **If** I give away all I have, and **if** I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing”.

➔ This really sounds like Paul - ever the missionary, doesn't it? He was always seeking to reach the hearts of new people, in new cultures. **“If only**, I could speak all their languages; speak like an angel. **If only** I could preach with prophetic power; grasping and sharing all of the marvelous wonders of God's Word. **If only** I could move the mountains and, with faith, jump the furthest sea. **If only** I were more willing to give all I've got; to give myself; to be burned in the place of another; to give myself just like my loving Lord Jesus did!”

- ✘ What was the question? What more do you need to be a better lover? Paul gave us an entire list of great attributes; things of which I think all of us would certainly be jealous and wish we could have. “If only...”. But then he says with each one, “but have not love...I am nothing...I gain nothing”.
 - What do I need to be a better lover? I need love! Do I have it? Do you have it?
 - I’ve got good news! You have been loved; unconditionally, undeservedly! You are loved by God! He alone has poured out His heart upon you. You are filled to the brim and more with love from God.
- ✘ Imagine that the list of Paul’s “if onlys” actually came true in you. Imagine God empowered your tongue to speak all languages; to speak of love like the angels. Imagine God gives you the power of prophets; to fully understand all the mysteries of creation and God’s truth, as well as the faith of mountain-movers. And then imagine you actually give all of that; all of those gifts to others in the cause of God’s love.
 - If so, would that make God love you just a wee bit more? Or, is it true that just as you are already today, God actually holds nothing back when He loves you?
 - Did God love Paul because of what Paul did for God? No! God loved Paul from before Paul did anything. Even when Paul hated Jesus and gave all he had to try and wipe out Christ’s people, God still loved Paul to the max.
- ✘ So, why does God love you? Because of you? No, God loves you because of Himself! The old hymn says it this way, “Just as I am, without one plea But that Thy blood was shed for me” (LSB 570:1)! Perfectly and forever, God loves you!
 - It’s a silly prayer that so many Christians cry out, “God, if only You would make me more like Jesus, then I would love like Jesus”. Really? Perhaps this would be a better way to pray, “God, You have loved me. You have baptized me. You made Your own. So, help me to believe in Your love for me. Help me to live Your love, each day; with each person.”
- ✘ What more do you need to be a better lover? Nothing! Only Jesus! Look again at Paul’s words. Does he really describe himself, or is it someone else you know? Who speaks to your heart; to every heart, no matter the tongue in a manner that alone opens that heart? Who speaks a word sweeter than angels? Who has the perfect power of a prophet; knowing all of God’s mysteries? Who is able to move mountains? Who gave His all, body and soul, to God’s righteous wrath, for those He loves! This One has love; ...is love.
 - Perhaps you heard about the guy who played the part of Jesus in the church Passion Play. As he shouldered the heavy cross, stumbling up the church’s long driveway, he felt so honored. As his friends from church played their parts – moaning, jeering, heaping insults, the actor shed no tears.
 - But then he heard the voice of his next door neighbor; the one with whom he had some conflict. This neighbor responded to the man’s invitation and showed up for the play. He joined in with the jeers, tossing out lines that were not in the script. “You think you’re so big, ‘Jesus’; too busy to mow your lawn?” Soon the jibes became even more personal. “Your house is ugly; almost as ugly as your daughter!”
 - That “Jesus” actor finally had enough. Throwing down the cross, he stomped over to his neighbor. Hot words ensued; words I can’t repeat. The Passion Play ground to a halt. Everyone tried to smooth things out.
- ✘ Afterward the director told “Jesus”, “Tomorrow night, we’re going to let your stand-in play the Lord”. The poor man was so embarrassed; heartsick. He begged, “Please, I can do this”.

- Sure enough, the next night, his neighbor came back for round two, just as angry; just as mean! You could see “Jesus”, red-faced, struggling under the cross. But the neighbor kept dishing it out, “Don’t get me started on your momma!”
- With clenched teeth, “Jesus” cocked his head and fixed his stare on his tormentor and said, “I’ll deal with you after the resurrection!”
- ⊗ Hmm, is that our Jesus? All of our nastiness hits His heart. Yet He carries our sin to the cross; all the way to the grave. How? Why? It’s because His heart is filled with love. He rises; He lives! And how does He deal with us now? He loves you and me still today!
 - If only I could be...you could be a better lover like that; like Jesus!

II. Where Can You Get More/Better Love?

- ⊗ That’s the question of all questions then, isn’t it? How can I get that kind of love? Where do I go to find it? What’s the source; what do I log into or tap into, or from whom can I get more and better love?
 - Paul’s words - they are a beautiful description of perfect love. Do his words describe you? Or me? Here’s a scary exercise. Try to repeat Paul’s sermon, but substitute your name for the word *love* in verses 4–7, like this:

“_____ is patient and kind; _____ does not envy or boast; _____ is not arrogant or rude. _____ does not insist on [his/her] own way; _____ is not irritable or resentful; _____ does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. _____ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
 - ⊗ Ouch! Those words stick in my throat. I need to thank all of you, my loving friends, for not booing, and throwing hymnals, because my love fails. My heart goes dry. Yes, I am painfully aware that I need to be a better lover!
 - And I’m pretty sure that you too don’t match up to all of Paul’s words either, right? Frankly, is there anyone with whom Paul’s portrait of love is a match?
 - ⊗ As we said before – Jesus! Jesus is patient. Has he ever said, “I forgave you before, but now no more”? Jesus is kind – always nudging us; helping us when we’re stuck. Jesus does not envy or boast. It’s an absurd picture, to think of Jesus at the throne, bragging, “Father, look at me. I am perfect; I’m better than those losers!” In truth, Jesus is at the throne pleading, “Father, see these wounds You gave Me for them. Forgive them, guard them, guide them Father, for Me!”
 - Jesus is not arrogant or rude. He does not insist on His own way; gladly giving Himself into the hands of His God. Remember His words from the Garden, “My Father...not as I will, but as You will” (Mat 26:39).
 - Jesus is not irritable or resentful. He does not rejoice at the plethora of wrongdoing done against Him. Do sin and death do wrong against you? Does the devil wrong you? Yes, the devil is delighted to do you wrong! Yet, everything that is wrong with you, and everything wrong does to you, this literally kills Jesus! As a gentle lamb led to the slaughter, Jesus lovingly takes it to the cross.
 - ⊗ Jesus rejoices with the truth. With the truth of His Easter joy; the resurrection roar; the victory dance of new life Jesus truly loves you!
 - Yes, Jesus “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (v. 7). All that His Father promises – Jesus pours out upon us through His Holy Spirit’s faith-giving work for you! Jesus “never ends” (v 8).

- ⊗ So, what's the source of better love; where can you get it? Nowhere but Jesus! He is the one that Paul describes here in our text today.
 - ➔ So what's your part; my part in this picture of love from Paul here? If Jesus is the source and the picture of love, then you and I are the recipients. God has given each of us different abilities and experiences. That's why He brought us together here in His church family, so that we each can make our unique contribution. He loves us so that we can now love one another. When we have the perfect source of love pouring His perfect fountain into us each and every day we can't help it. Jesus' love just naturally overflows to those around us who do not yet know Him.
- ⊗ This is God's Word of promise in verse 13, "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love".
 - ➔ Think of what that means: Faith holds on to Jesus. It takes His love to heart. Hope then looks forward to all that Jesus so lovingly gives us. Why then is love the greatest? Only love nails God's heart. In his First Letter John says flat out, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God". "...God is love." (1 Jn. 4:8, 7).
- ⊗ There it is. Now Paul has shown us "the more excellent way" to being a better lover. It's not about looking in the mirror or doing something to make ourselves "better", but looking instead to Paul's picture of Jesus and receiving everything – all of His love from Him.
 - ➔ Verse 12, "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known". To be known by Jesus is to be loved by Jesus. To be loved by Jesus is how we love others in Jesus' name and power each day! Amen.