

4th Sunday after Epiphany
Text: I Corinthians 12:27-13:13
Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

St. Peter's - Lafayette Hill, PA.
January 31, 2010

"No Greater Love"

LOVE! What a wonderful thing. But who is loved more? Is it the wife with the largest diamond on the ring? How about the family with the biggest House? Perhaps it's the person who goes on the most vacations? Paul makes an attempt to guide the congregation at Corinth on the merits of Love. Last week we read the first part of his letter to this congregation. Apparently they were having some trouble being "loving." They were arguing over who was most important. So Paul uses the image of the body and how the hand is not more important than the eye which is not more important than the foot because they are all vital in the Body - the Body of Christ.

After he makes that point, Paul moves on to how we should love one another. Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful. Love bears all things, believes all things, Hopes all things, Endures all things. If only was that easy. Love is Patient - even when we've been waiting for years? Love is Kind - even when we hear the harsh words? Love is not jealous - even when the other person is getting their attention? Love is not boastful - even when we know we're right and they are wrong? Love bears all things - even a betrayal or the death of a child? Love believes all things - even when it's an excuse that seems questionable? Love hopes all things - even when a situation seems hopeless. Love endures all things - even when there is an admission of an affair? Love is not humble. And when times get tough, Love becomes even harder to express.

In the Midwest the summer of 1993 was the summer of the "great flood." The rains, it seemed, would never cease. Rivers all across the central section of our country broke from their banks, broke through retaining walls and laid waste to ten thousands of acres of farmland and many cities. It was a summer of horror for great a number of people. Many of them lost just about everything they had.

Tom and Donna Starr manage several hundred acres of farmland in western Illinois adjacent to the Mississippi River. For the Starrs, the flood of '93 was a great catastrophe. They watched in horror as the flood waters moved ever closer to their land. Maybe the rains would let up in time. Maybe the crest of the flood had already been reached and they were safe. Maybe the flood waters would miraculously miss their land. They had great hopes. This land was their livelihood. This land was their life. "Please God, please!" they cried out in prayer, "spare the land." But the land was not spared. The waters lapped around the edges at first.

Then the torrent broke loose. Every acre was under water. There would be no crops this year. There would be an erosion of their soil to devastate future years as well. The Starrs were devastated.

But the worst was yet to come. Their concern had been with their land and livelihood. Now the waters moved in toward their home. Grandpa Starr had had the foresight to build the land up around the house just in case the river would ever spill over its banks. The Starrs hadn't even thought to worry about the house. As the

waters rose relentlessly, however, the house became a big concern. Maybe you could survive without your land but how in the world could you survive without your home? Their prayers now turned to their home. They prayed to God to spare their home. "Spare our home, Lord," they pleaded. "It's all we have." But it was not to be. The raging river inundated their home as well. The basement filled with water.

But that was not the end of it. Water rose up four feet high on the main floor of the two-story house.

At first Tom and Donna Starr thought they could ride out the flood safe in their home.

They soon realized, however, that their lives would be endangered if they tried to wait out the flood in their house. They would have to abandon everything they held dear. Then another shock wave hit them. Could they get out? Would the pick-up make it through? Were the roads open? Their prayers turned personal. "Spare our lives, dear Lord," they prayed. "Just help us get out of here alive."

The Starrs did get out alive. Their lives were spared. The land was good as gone. So was their house. "We've got nothing left," Tom said to Donna after they finally reached shelter.

Donna was silent for a moment. She looked at Tom with tears in her eyes and whispered, "I Love You. We've got each other. We've got our love." It was Tom's turn to be silent. Finally he spoke, "We've got God's love too." Tom and Donna Starr agreed that day. On the one hand they had lost just about all their earthly treasures. But they had love. They had their love for each other and their family. They had the love of God. The flood hadn't even touched the greatest treasure of all."

Faith - Hope - Love abide - these three - but the Greatest of these is LOVE! Love is one of the greatest gifts God ever gives to us. But so many times we place conditions on it. If you love me, you will do such and such.

You'll buy me that, if you love me. You won't take that new job, you'll stop smoking, you'll spend more time with the kids, you'll stop going on girl's-night-out, you'll give up the football games, you'll put the toilet seat down - IF you love me!

We often put conditions on love that were never meant to be there.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends.

Oh if only! If only we could love one another the way God loves us. God tells us to live our lives one way, but we tend to go off and live it a different way. And God still loves us. We make promises to God, and then break those promises. But God still loves us and keeps the promises he makes to us. God tells us to "Turn the other cheek," but we tend to lash out and take revenge. And still God loves us and forgives us. God tells us to Love your neighbor as yourself. But in our greed we keep all we can, and share a lot less than we should. But God still

loves us and continues to provide for us. God so love the world that he sent his only Son! . . . and we killed him. But God still loves us, forgives us, and gives us the promise of Eternal Life, because, although we took God's Son God has made *us* his sons and daughters.

If only - if only we could be patient and kind, not jealous or boastful, arrogant or rude, not insist on our own way. But this thing called Sin gets in our way. Things such as greed, envy, covetousness, gluttony, and a long list of other things compete for the place those qualities of love should be occupying. But if we really Love God with all our heart, mind and soul, we need to show it by loving one another. Love is not measured by who has the biggest diamond, the largest house, the most vacations or the easiest life. Our love for one another is shown by how much we love God.

We like to say that we love God with all our heart, mind, and soul. If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. In other words - talk is cheap. Paul is telling us to put our Love into action! As the body of Christ, we try to do that. You may not think that donation you made to the Earthquake victims in Haiti was much. But as the Body of Christ a total of \$5,211,000 has been given so far. Yesterday people were in our Fellowship Hall lying on stretchers giving Blood, something that can't be bought, to help people in need. We don't do these things to earn our way into heaven. We don't do these things for credit or recognition. We do these things because we love God. and because we love God we love one another.

So Faith - Hope - Love abide. But the GREATEST of these - - - is Love! Amen