



## LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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### Love One Another Romans 12:10-13

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July 15, 2018 – Trinity 7

Last Sunday we looked at Romans 12:9. I titled that sermon “Love”. This morning we’ll continue in Romans 12, looking at verses 10-13. I’ve titled this sermon, “Love One Another”. Paul moves from love in a general sense to talk about how love is put into action within the church, within the body of Christ.

As I said last week, Paul doesn’t tell us what love by giving a theological or philosophical discourse on love. He tells us what love is by telling us what love does and does not do. The Bible does quite a lot of this. I think, in particular, of St. John. If anyone gets philosophical or theological about love, John does, but then, just as Paul, John tells us what love is in practical terms. Most of all, John points to Jesus. He reminds us of the love we see in Jesus, who not only humbled himself to be born as one of us, but then went to the cross and died for us—died for the sake of his *enemies*. If you ever question what love is, if you ever question if an action is loving or unloving, Brothers and Sisters, look to Jesus and look, especially, to the cross. Does our love measure up to the love we see in Jesus who gave his life for us?

This is important. Sinful human beings have always struggled with love. The world has a very confused idea of love. It confuses sex with love. It confuses permissiveness with love. It even confuses selfishness with love. Even when the world does look to Jesus as it wonders about love, it all too often takes a selective view. It quotes him saying, “Judge not!”, but it ignores him when he says, “Go and sin no more.”

What we saw last week in verse 9 is that love both clings and hates. Love—real love—is inherently discriminating. Paul

wrote that real love *abhors* whatever is evil and *holds fast* to whatever is good. Love isn’t about sentimentality or mushy feelings. Love is committed to seeing good, to living good, to accomplishing good. Now in verses 10-13 Paul elaborates. He tells us nine ways that love operates. Look at what he writes:

**Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.**

Paul begins each of these phrases with a noun. It’s hard to put his emphasis into English—or, at least, good English—but the sense is something like, “In regard to brotherly affection, love on another. In regard to honour, outdo one another. In regard to zeal, don’t be lazy.” Each time Paul puts the stress on these virtues that characterise love and then tells the us how to practise them in the Church, amongst our brothers and sisters.

The first thing in Paul’s list is our love for each other. What does that look like? The ESV says, “Love one another with brotherly affection.” Paul mentions two kind of love here. It helps to know that in ancient Greek, there were four word for love. In verse 9 we saw the word *agape*. The other three words are *philia*, *storge*, and *eros*. *Eros* refers to sexual love and never turns up in the New Testament. That may be because it had become such a corrupt concept in the Greco-Roman world—something like the way people today can talk about “making love” to a prostitute when doing something like that is about as unloving an action one could take. There’s a bit of overlap between the other words and sometimes they’re used almost interchangeably, but *agape* usually refers to the love of God and, by extensions, the love that Christians have for God in return and the love we have for each other. The other two words, *philia* and *storge* are what Paul uses in verse 10. He starts out saying, “In regard to *philadelphia*...” Who knows

what *philadelphia* means? It’s a compound of two words: “love” and “brother”. *Philadelphia* is the sort of family-love that we see between brothers and sisters. We love each other no matter what, because we’re part of the same family. And Paul says, in regard to that kind of love in the church, it should be characterised by—and he uses another compound word—*philostorgoi*. It’s another word for brotherly love, but this one has the sense of devotion—the kind of close-knit and mutually supportive devotion that the members of a family have. All of that to say: As Christian brothers and sisters, we should be loving each other the way real brothers and sisters or husbands and wives and parents and children love and are devoted to each other.

Jesus makes us a family, *Brothers and Sisters*, and we need to live and love as a family. Do we? It’s a question we need to ask ourselves. Do we live as a family?

Paul goes on and gives us some details as to what this should look like. He says in the next part of verse 10: “In regard to honour, lead the way for one another.” That means to put others first. The word Paul uses is hard to translate, but the sense is that instead of thinking of ourselves, we ought to be falling over each other in a rush to show honour to our brothers and sisters. Think again of Jesus, who humbled himself to be born one of us and who humbled himself again to die on the cross. If he gave his life for his enemies, how much more ought we to give our lives for the sakes of our brother and sisters in Christ? Paul wrote to the Philippians, saying, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). This is what real love looks like. It rushes to be first in line, but not to seek its own honour, but to show honour to others.

Third, moving into verse 11, Paul writes, “In regard to zeal, don’t be lazy.” He says something similar in Galatians 6:9 where he writes not to be weary in well-doing. Following Jesus requires diligence. When we grasp the

significance of the good news that Jesus is Lord and that he has died and risen for us, it ought to move us or inspire us to do the work and to live the life of his kingdom. The gospel ought to light a fire under us—which is one of the next points Paul will make. We see this, especially, when people first hear the good news and first trust in Jesus. Even those of us who have grown up in the Church and can't remember a time when we didn't know Jesus, have experienced times when something we've read or some experience of Jesus and the Spirit has really inspired us and motivated us to love God, to love each other, to use our gifts, or to go out and tell. And then we get tired. Or we get bored. The excitement wears off. We face opposition and we lose the joy we first had. All sorts of things can happen and our zeal begins to wane and we become lazy or slothful Christians.

Sometimes it's that we set the wrong priorities. We may start out with the best of intentions to put Jesus and his Church first, but other things get in the way. Sometimes things that are otherwise good get in the way if we let them slip into the place of first priority. We have to work. We have to earn a living. We have to spend time with our families. We need to have down time to rest and relax and enjoy ourselves. We just need to remember that Jesus *must* be our first priority. But sometimes it's our old idols that we let slip back into first place. We need to work, but sometimes money slips back into being our highest priority. Maybe it's our status or prestige. It may even be our old sins. Brothers and Sisters, when we get lazy and let our old sins slip back into our lives, Jesus and our brothers and sisters are almost always sidelined.

Be diligent about Jesus. Be diligent in cultivating the life of the Spirit. Be diligent in cultivating the life of Jesus and the Spirit in your children. Be diligent in doing your part in the body of Christ. If you're an eye be the best eye the Spirit enables you to be. If you're a hand, be the best hand the Spirit enables you to be. If you're a spleen, be the best spleen the Spirit enable you to be. And rely on him, not yourself. If you rely on

you, I guarantee you will become weary in your well-doing.

That leads right into the next phrase. Paul writes, "In regard to the spirit, be fervent." He's probably not referring to the Holy Spirit, but to our spirits that radiate Jesus. But that's just it, we can't do this without the Holy Spirit. The word for fervent has both the sense of boiling over and being excited or enthusiastic. Brother and Sisters, if we are focused daily on the good news that Jesus died and rose for us, if we are focused daily on the good news that he has saved us from our sin and plunged us into his Spirit in our baptism, if we focused daily on the reality that the Spirit has renewed our cold and loveless hearts and put in them a love for God that fulfils his promises, our own spirits will be boiling and bubbling over with love for Jesus and love for each other.

But this boiling over of the spirit isn't out of control. Paul says next, "In regard to the Lord, serving." I've run across some Christians who are fervent in spirit, but like a pot of oatmeal boiling over, everywhere they go they leave a mess. Think of gasoline. It burns. You can spill it all over the ground, set it on fire, and it'll burn, but it won't accomplish anything and it might even do some damage. But if you put that gasoline in your car, there's a fuel system that delivers it safely to the engine where it's sparked with precision to make an explosion that pushes pistons and powers the vehicle. The Spirit is something like that too. The Spirit isn't given to us to gush all over and set everything ablaze. The Spirit has been given to us so that we can *serve the Lord*. It starts with the love for God he puts in our hearts and then he moves in us, motivating the abilities and the gifts that God has given. If God has called you to be eye in the body of Christ, or a hand, or a spleen, it's the Spirit who makes it possible for you to serve the body in that way. And the emphasis is on serving the body, on serving Jesus, on working towards his agenda and not your own. Again, in doing this, we're following Jesus' own example. St. Matthew says that he came not to be served, but to serve, giving his life as

ransom for many". Once again, when we wonder how to put love into action, we need to look to the cross.

Moving into verse 12, Paul writes, "In regard to hope, rejoicing. In regard to trouble, enduring. In regard to prayer, constant."

Brothers and Sisters, the love of God should cause us to live together in hope. The good news should change our perspective and that should change the way we live. Carl Sagan was famous for his line that "The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." That's it. What we can see. What we can look back on with our telescopes. That's all there is and there will be nothing more than more of the same. That's the world's perspective. Sin has driven a wedge between heaven and earth, between God's realm and ours and apart from faith, apart from the work of Jesus and the Spirit, all we can know is what we can see. The wages of sin is death, Paul wrote back in Chapter 6, and when our horizon is bounded by death, it's hard to live with any kind of hope. The world is what is. We are what we are. We can hope for ice cream for desert. We can hope our kids will be financially better off than we are. We can hope to die in peace. But that's it.

But, Brothers and Sisters, if we are in Christ, he has lifted the veil on the realm of God. He's poured his Spirit into us and has given us a taste of the life we gave up when we chose to sin, the life he has promised to resurrect us to at the end of the age. Jesus has expanded our horizon. He's given a glimpse into heaven and a taste of life, *real* life. And so we live in expectant hope, knowing that there is more for us than the grave and more for the cosmos than more of the same. We live in hope knowing that when Jesus burst out of the empty tomb, he began to set Creation to rights and that one day he will make all things new. If people can rejoice and party on an airplane bound for a place like Las Vegas, anticipating the short-lived joys of indulging the flesh, how much more ought the church to rejoice? We're travelling together on a journey to the

New Jerusalem and the life of the age to come.

Trouble and tribulation, however, are bound to come. Jesus warned: “A disciple is not greater than his master. They persecuted me and they will persecute you.” The world doesn’t like the people who expose the bankruptcy of its shallow and false hopes. And, it goes without saying, that as much as Jesus’ kingdom is breaking into the world and we see its fruit all around us, the Church has not fully accomplished our mission and we still wait for the day when everything is finally and fully made new and when every tear is wiped away. The consequences of our sin are still real. People still lie, cheat, and steal. Violence is still a part of life. Disease is real and our genes are still sometimes mutated, broken and sick. And so, in regard to trouble, we endure—in hope and in faith. In Jesus we have seen the righteousness of God revealed. Jesus is the proof that God keeps his promises. God promised to set his Creation to rights, in the death and resurrection of Jesus he has done the hard part of fulfilling the promises. And so we live in faith and hope knowing that what God has begun, he will surely finish. He did not sacrifice his Son in vain. And he did not give his Spirit to the Church only to give up on two thousand years invested into the venture. What he has said he will do so we endure.

It's not always easy and so, “In regard to prayer, we are to be constant”. Brother and Sisters, prayer changes things and it changes things mostly because it changes us. Prayer is the expression of faith. We ask God, because we believe he can do something. We ask God, because we’ve seen what he can do and because we’ve seen what he has in store. We ask God because we have faith. And, like the man who cried out to Jesus, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief,” the more we ask and the more we pray the more our unbelief will become belief. The more we pray, the more we will learn to trust in the wisdom and goodness of God regardless of our circumstances.

Or course, this means that our prayer needs to be prayer according to God’s will. Friends, pray the Scriptures. Immerse yourself in the Bible and then pray it back to God. Pray the Psalms—God’s own words—pray them back to him. Use the Prayer Book. It’s mostly Scripture itself, but it guides us through reading God’s word and it teaches us to pray God’s word and it teaches us pray God’s agenda. And it teaches us to pray not just for ourselves, but for our world and for each other. That’s important. Paul says to be constant in prayer and we should broadly apply that, but in the context here of Romans 12, he’s talking specifically about our life together as the Church. As *the Church* be constant in prayer. Pray for each other and, as the writer of Hebrews tells us, “Do not neglect to meet together”. We need to pray corporately as much as we need to pray individually. As our individual prayer shapes us, our corporate prayer will shape the church.

Finally, Paul writes in verse 13 that we should take care of each other. The ESV translates it as two separate statements: “Contribute to the needs of the saints” and “seek to show hospitality”. But for Paul this is actually one statement: “In regard to the needs of the saints, participating, practicing hospitality”. We need to participate or share in the needs of others and as we do so, we need to show hospitality. Brothers and Sisters, this is more than having a benevolent fund and giving money to people who are struggling financially. It’s about knowing and caring about and loving each other enough that we know what we’re all struggling with. And then it’s about identifying with our brothers and sisters in those struggles and needs and providing our support. Yes, that can be providing material support to someone in need. But it also means mourning with those who mourn. It means being company to those who are lonely. It means sharing peace with those who are anxious. It means caring for those who are sick. It means walking alongside, holding up and struggling with those who struggle. This is what love in action looks like. Jesus even went so far as to make it a test. In Matthew 25 he

said, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (Matthew 25:34-36).

Brothers and Sisters, love is the key characteristic of Jesus’ people. In fulfilment of God’s promises through the prophets, Jesus has removed our hearts of stone and, through his indwelling Spirit, given us hearts of flesh full of love for God and for each other. This is how he recognizes us. He doesn’t know us because we can perfectly recite the Creed. He doesn’t know us because we’re at church every Sunday without fail. He doesn’t know us because we put a cheque in the offering plate every week. He doesn’t know us because we argue for him on the Internet day and night. All of those things may be important. But first and foremost, he knows us because he sees in us the love that he has placed in our hearts.

I want to close with the well-known words of St. John, reminding us that we love because he first loved us and reminding us as we seek to love, to look to Jesus and his cross.

**Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:7-10)**