

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (EHV)

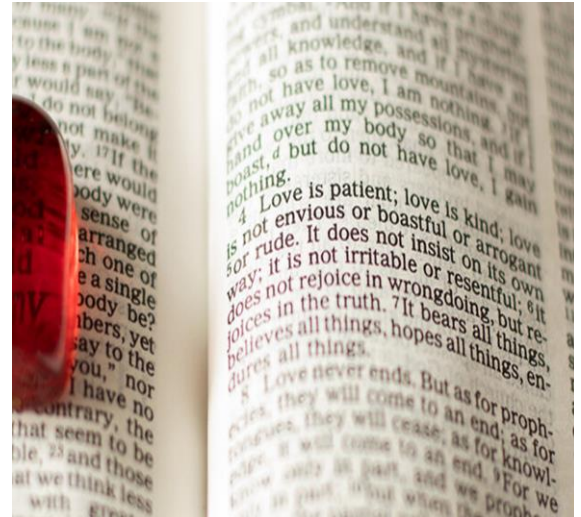
¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and have all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away everything I own, and if I give up my body that I may be burned but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. It does not brag. It is not arrogant. ⁵ It does not behave indecently. It is not selfish. It is not irritable. It does not keep a record of wrongs. ⁶ It does not rejoice over unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never comes to an end. But if there are prophetic gifts, they will be done away with; if tongues, they will cease;

if knowledge, it will be done away with. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, ¹⁰ but when that which is complete has come, that which is partial will be done away with. 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 put away childish things. ¹² Now we see indirectly using a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I was fully known.

¹³ So now these three remain: faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.



Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so we may be people who love as your Son, Jesus Christ, loves us. Amen.

You may or may not know this, but the Lutheran Church of Australia, of whom each congregation (and its members) are voluntary members of, has a tag line: ‘Where love comes to life.’

This might be an attempt to describe what happens in our church, what we’re supposed to do in church, or what we’re hoping to become as a church. However, there are many people who might disagree with this tagline because they’ve experienced some very *unloving* words and actions by people who belong to the church.

But, if we were to judge whether we are a place or people ‘where love comes to life,’ let’s *not* judge our love from any *human* understanding, but from *God’s* description of love, which St Paul so famously describes in our text for today.

In this case, as individual members of this church (where love supposedly comes to life), I invite you to rate yourself on the following questions:

- How patient are you? That is, are you good at being willing to wait without complaint, even in times of suffering? Are you always self-controlled and calm, even when people provoke or criticise you?
- How kind are you I? That is, are you willing to be generous and caring, even to irritable and fussy people? Do you show mercy and forgiveness to those who don’t deserve it, even when you know they’ll never show you the same?
- Do you get jealous? For instance, do you desire what others have, and work out how you can get

the same? Do you compare yourself with others? Are you always happy for others when they've been blessed, even if you don't get to share in their blessing?

- Do you boast about yourself, or get puffed up by your own sense of opinion or importance? Do you want people to notice you, compliment you, or thank you for your service? Are you happy for others to get more positive attention than you do?
- How do you behave? Are there times when you've behaved disgracefully, dishonestly, or indecently? Or do you always behave with dignity, honesty, and honour, even when people aren't watching?
- Do you insist on your own way of doing things? In other words, do you seek first what's good for you? Do you attempt to force others to agree with you, and do you think less of them when they don't? Or do you always seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?
- Are you easily irritated and snap at others at the drop of the hat? Does your stomach churn and blood pressure increase because you're upset at others? Or are you always slow to get angry?
- Do you dwell on all the evil done against you and how unfair life is? Do you hold a grudge against others because of what they've done, or what they haven't done? Or are you willing to forgive and no longer let the incidents of the past hinder your relationships?
- Do you delight in evil? Well, of course you wouldn't want to say such a thing! But do you have a chuckle when you see people get hurt (especially when you watch YouTube clips from 'Fail Army'), or when people make jokes at someone else's expense, or do you pass on juicy rumours about others before checking the facts?

How did you go? How would you rate yourself? How would others rate you? Don't worry, even though I might seem like a nice guy, I've failed in most of these areas too!

Are we all people who can honestly say 'love *always* comes to life' in all our thoughts, words, and actions, or does something else come to life in our interactions at home, work, community, or church?

So, if we're not people 'where love comes to life', what's going wrong? Aren't we trying hard enough? Should we try harder and write a set of policies which clearly sets out the expected behaviour of each person? Should we have a meeting and set out the facts so that we make sure those who did the wrongs things are brought to justice? And if anyone stuffs up, should we get rid of all those who don't let their love come to life?

The truth is, by our own power none of us can ever love perfectly, and if we ever wanted to get rid of everyone who doesn't love us perfectly, well, there'll be no-one left!

You see, unfortunately...

- Instead of hallowing God's name, we often want our own names to be great.
- Instead of seeking the kingdom of God and submitting to God's order and reign, we often think we know better and want others to submit to our own expectations or desires.
- Instead of seeking the will of God, we often want our own will to be done – and in our own time frame!
- Instead of being content with the daily blessings God gives us, we often want more and more.

- Instead of forgiving as God graciously and undeservedly forgives us, we often make our own forgiveness conditional on others doing the right thing first.
- Instead of asking God to lead us *not* into temptation, we often eagerly place ourselves (and others), into situations where we're tempted to act dishonestly, rudely, or irritably.
- Instead of looking to God to deliver us from evil, we often dwell on all the evil done to us, hold onto the hate building in our hearts, rejoice in our own attempts to get back at people, and encourage others to do the same.

This means we don't always fear, love, or trust God above all things and instead end up idolising ourselves and our own selfish desires.

So, who will save us from all the evil of 'unlove' done to us (and by us)? Who will save us from the devil's deceptions who loves to call evil 'good' and good 'evil'? Who will save us from the death we deserve for not being people where 'love comes to life'?

Well, thanks be to God for Jesus Christ!

Jesus is the *only one* who is patient and kind. Jesus isn't jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Jesus doesn't demand his own way. Jesus isn't irritable, and he keeps no record of being wronged. Jesus doesn't rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever God's truth wins out. Jesus never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

There is only one place 'where love truly comes to life' and it's in the person of Jesus Christ. He patiently, faithfully, and eagerly loves each of you, whether you like it or not!

Jesus, the bodily incarnation of God's pure love, was the One who received the punishment each of you deserve for your lack of patience, your lack of mercy, your pride, your irritability, and your selfish behaviours. Because he took all the punishment you deserve through his suffering and death, you and I are forgiven by God for not loving as we should.

What you might discover is that, if the source for your own love is reliant on your own capacity for love, or based on the loveliness of others, then your love will always fall short. On the other hand, if the source for your own love is reliant on how much Jesus loves you (which is inexhaustible), then you can't help but love the same way.

This means the *only* way you can be a person or family or congregation or parish 'where love comes to life' is when you love as Jesus first loves you, which means Jesus Christ, and *his* gracious love, must be central to all you think and say and do.

You need to keep hearing how Jesus literally loves you to death – that is, he loves you so much he willingly died for the forgiveness of your sins. When you hear your sins are forgiven here on earth, you're also to trust they're also forgiven and no longer recalled in heaven.

You need to keep receiving his love in real ways, such as remembering how you're washed in his love when he baptises you. In this way, baptism isn't a once-off event. It's to affect your whole life. This is because in baptism Jesus keeps on cleansing you from all your sin. In baptism, because you're joined to Jesus, you keep on receiving his love like a lifeblood.

Similarly in Holy Communion you need to keep tasting his love as he nourishes you with his very own loving body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. As you receive his love within you, you're to let his love flow through you toward your neighbours.

Therefore, it's when you empty yourselves of yourself, and repent of your own selfish idolatry, pride, and envy, and look to Christ to fill you with his own faith, hope, and love through his trustworthy Word and holy Sacraments, that you might learn to share *Christ's love* with each other. It's only then that you *may* be people 'where love comes to life.'

Of course, this doesn't always mean all your own loving actions, born out of the love of Christ for you, will always be readily accepted. Even Jesus wasn't well accepted in his hometown.

It could be that the hardest places to practice your love (as you've been loved by Christ), is in your own home and in your own church.

You see, they already know you too well. They've already seen you at your most impatient, unmerciful, jealous, proud, rude, indecent, irritable, self-seeking, and untrustworthy worst. You also know them very well and you've probably also seen them at their worst (which makes it hard to love them)!

But no matter what you experience from them (or them from you), this is where God has placed you to live out the love of Christ. You're the vessels who need to keep on receiving God's love, and you're the servants whom God has placed among your family and friends and neighbours to share *his* love, patience, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion.

So, is this church a place 'where love comes to life'? Well, no, it isn't, at least, not if you're looking for you and me to love with God's exacting expectations under our own power. But it's not to be about us and our love or lack of it. It should always be about *Christ* and *his* perfect love, because he's the only one where love truly comes to life. This means we're to be the place where *Christ's* love comes to life.

So, even when we fail to love as we ought, this is the place where *Christ's love* is proclaimed, and where *Christ's love* is communicated in word, water, bread, wine, and in our humble service to each other as we learn to love like Christ loves us.

Therefore, with the help of the Holy Spirit, may our parish, our congregations, and our homes, be places where Christ's patient, merciful, humble, and sacrificial love comes to life.

And may the peace and love of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in the love of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Stuart Kleinig
South Burnett Lutheran Parish
4th Sunday after Epiphany
2nd February 2025