

4th Sunday after Epiphany
January 30, 2022

“Have love will travel” (1 Corinthians 13:13)
By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text for this 4th Sunday after Epiphany is from the Epistle reading for today, 1 Corinthians 13:13.

“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Here ends our text.

Amen.

How would you fill in this sentence? Have “blank” will travel. Have money will travel? Have a degree will travel?

The phrase means that if you have a certain skill or an ability, you could perform that skill anywhere that you’re needed. During this pandemic we’ve seen how nurses and doctors were and still are in high demand because of their skills. Their abilities could be used anywhere and especially we saw busloads of nurses arriving to the valley at the beginning of this pandemic when we were overwhelmed with infected people before there was a vaccine.

How about this phrase? “Have love will travel”? There was a song written by Richard Berry in 1959 with that title and others like the Sonics and Tom Petty also wrote their versions of it.

The Holy Spirit, of course, wrote the best version of “have love will travel” in this 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians. For His love is the essential ingredient in all that we do in life, wherever we go and wherever we are.

As Paul closed out chapter 12 that we heard last week, he spoke of the different gifts that the Holy Spirit gives the body of Christ, the church - you and me.

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.” (1 Corinthians 12:27-28)

God’s masterplan of His bestowing of gifts, of course, includes you. Whether you serve as a foot, a hand, an eye, a mouth at different times in your life, it is all for the glory of God and the good of God’s people.

And then, Paul ends the chapter with some words for each of us to ponder and take to heart.

“But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.”

Kretzmann says in his popular commentary, “Strive after those gifts of the Spirit which are of the greatest benefit to the work of the Lord in the Church”.

“You figure it out” is what Paul is saying. He’s given each of us Godly reason and wisdom to desire, pray for, and use the gifts that are best needed for the service and extension of God’s kingdom.

Do you see yourself being led by the Holy Spirit to serve in prison ministry, ministry to children, men’s ministry, women’s ministry, hospital volunteer work or chaplaincy, the armed forces, winter Texans ministry, Border ministry, cross cultural ministry, ministry to the elderly, hospice ministry, nursing home ministry, ministry to troubled youth, the homeless, out of wedlock mothers, or those with addictions. Maybe God has called you to serve as a deacon, a deaconesses, a pastor, teacher or missionary. And the list is never ending because the afflictions because of our sin are never ending. The body of Christ is equipped for each task by the Holy Spirit who gives to His people what is needed, where it is needed.

Above all...now... Paul finishes chapter 12 with a very telling phrase which leads us into chapter 13.

“And yet I show you a more excellent way.”

For all these different ministries, gifts and abilities must be saturated with God’s most important gift – love. Agape love – sacrificial love. Have love will travel. For without love, the greatest acts of service, of feeding the poor, of knowledge, of speaking in different languages is like a clanging cymbal and profits nothing.

Love is the first and chief gift mentioned in the list of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul goes on in much detail to describe what love isn't. It's not rude, boastful, self-seeking, envious, rejoicing in evil. It thinks no evil. That is, it keeps no record of wrongs, but forgives.

Paul also tells what love is...it's long suffering, kind, rejoicing in truth, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things.

“Have love will travel.” For with love, the gift of God's love to you, you will be able to meet each situation you encounter in life with kindness, putting the best construction on everything, and believing and trusting that God is at work for the good of His people.

Agape love is a love for the utterly unworthy, a love which proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love lavished upon others without a thought of whether they are worthy to receive it or not. It's the love that the father showed to his prodigal son – the love that our Father in heaven shows to us prodigal sons and daughters.

It is a love which does not first look at gender, or race, or social standing, but first looks at all as God sees them - the objects of God's love, as those for whom Christ died.

It proceeds rather from the nature of the lover, than from any merit in the beloved. The Christian who has experienced God's love to him, while he was yet a sinner, has been transformed by the experience and his or her eyes have been opened to now have compassion on all.

Yes, it is true, that we have not always travelled with love. There have been times when we have been quick to anger and not long suffering...quick to keep a record of sins and not forgiving, envious instead of rejoicing. You name it we've all shown the opposite of love.

But, thanks be to God that His love travels to us daily to forgive us, renew us and lead us to love as He has loved us. His love travels to us in our baptism, daily

washing us of our sins. His love travels to us this day in the very body and blood of Jesus which are given and shed for our forgiveness.

For Jesus travelled to our sinful earth from heaven to suffer all the times we have lacked love. He travelled with love to heal the sick like Peter's mother-in-law in today's Gospel, drive out demons who tormented the people, give sight to the blind and most of all free us from the captivity of our sin.

Out of pure love, Jesus travelled to the cross and laid down His life that we would receive this love through our baptisms. Indeed, these three abide, faith, hope and love. Through faith we have received Christ's love and we have been given the sure hope of eternal life.

One day, we will not need faith for we will see Christ face to face. One day we will not need hope for we will receive the promise of our hope – eternal life in heaven.

And, as we wait, we wait with God's ever-present love. It is a love which will continue into eternity when faith and hope are no longer needed. And thus, it is the greatest of these. For the Lamb upon His throne will shepherd His people with love eternally.

“for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:17)

Paul says, **“now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”**

Now, we travel with love, Christ's love, not understanding or knowing fully how great this love is wherever I go and in whatever I do. But we take much comfort in that we are known by God, fully known as His elect, chosen, fully loved and forgiven children in Christ, who are given His manifold gifts to serve Him as the body of Christ.

And above all, in the most excellent way, we travel and serve with love, God's agape love. It's God's gift that He freely gives to you, is freely accessible to you and all believers in Christ, and is to flow freely from your heart in Christ. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)