

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 2
June 3, 2018
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
Love never fails

—Galatians 5:22,23; 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

So, what is it like? What is it like to have another shot at life? I borrow that phrase from Pastor Buchholz's sermon last week. He reminded us that we have another shot at life, so to speak. When we were born the first time we were born dead in sin. Separated from God. Cut off from eternal life. But by God's great love, you were born again of water and the Spirit. You were born again by baptism and by the living and enduring word of God. You were given a new life in Christ, worked by the Spirit of God. What is that new life like? This summer, for the next several weeks, we will answer that question in our sermon series on the Fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit worked in us the gift faith and spiritual life. The Holy Spirit has been given to us a deposit guaranteeing eternal life that is to come. The Holy Spirit continues to work in us to produce his fruit. **The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law** (Galatians 5:22, 23).

The fruit of the Spirit is love... Love tops the fruit of the Spirit list in Galatians chapter 5. Love. Because you know Jesus and because you have been born of the Spirit, you know what love is. It's not merely that romantic, mushy sort of happy feeling. It's not that sentiment where I really, really like something or someone because that particular thing or person brings me joy. The word that Paul uses for this fruit of the Spirit is *agape*. That's the word used for God's love in John 3:16—"**God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...**" It's the same word used in 1 Corinthians 13, which will serve as the basis for this morning's sermon.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

These really are beautiful words about love. 1 Corinthians 13 is often used at weddings, even by those who have very little biblical knowledge—it's a classic love poem of sorts. But these words of Paul were not written to a bride and groom on their wedding day. They were not written to a sweetheart on Valentine's day. These lovely words about love were actually written to a group Christians where love had been lacking. At the congregation in Corinth, in place of *agape* love there was division and competition. There was what their society called love, but it was really sexual immorality. In place of love there were fellow Christians taking each other to court. Instead of loving fellowship and unity at the Lord's Supper, some were cutting in front of others and getting drunk on the wine and eating all the bread before others could partake. In place of *agape* love there was also envy and pride—some envying the gifts and talents of others, others boasting of their "superior" gifts. Such beautiful verses about love were written to those who had failed to love.

For that reason, I don't think these words initially struck the people of Corinth as beautiful. If they were read them with a sincere and contrite heart, these words would have been quite condemning. In fact as I read these words and take an honest look at my heart, they are quite condemning too. I invite you to do the same for a moment. Look at the perfect picture of love painted in 1 Corinthians 13—**Love is patient, love is kind, It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs...**

Now look at your life. How do the two match up? If we're completely honest, we have to confess that love has been lacking in our lives. We have failed to love as love is portrayed here. All those things that love is supposed to do, I have failed to do. **Love is patient.** I can think of times where I've exercised patience, but I can think of times where my patience quickly ran short. Maybe my impatience didn't show itself on the outside, but it was there. **Love is kind.** Sure you can be kind to people. But at times behind our kind words and actions, are some very unkind and begrudging thoughts.

Then, all those things that love is not supposed to do... we find ourselves doing! **Love does not envy...** but I've envied and coveted rather than giving thanks for someone else's abilities or gifts. **Love does not boast, it is not proud...** but can you think of a time when your own pride stood in the way of showing love to someone else? **Love is not rude, it is not self-seeking...** and yet we steamroll over the needs of others to get our way. That's love for self, but that's not a fruit of the Spirit. **Love is not easily angered,** but it's so easy to fly off the handle when someone sins against me, or even just jump to conclusions when I think someone has sinned against me. **Love keeps no record of wrongs...** but

remember that one time, from years ago, when someone close to you let you down, stood you up, hurt you? Is there part of you that still wants to make them pay, or fall at your feet and beg for your mercy?

Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. Those words *always* and *never* really drive the nail into the coffin. **Love always...** Even though there are times in my life where love did triumph over impatience, rudeness, selfishness, envy. But always? No not always. **Love never fails...** but there's no denying that we have failed to love. And not just our neighbors, not just your spouse, not just your parents, not just your coworkers... If I haven't always loved others, I haven't always loved God. Jesus once summed up God's entire law with one word: Love. **Love the Lord your God with all your heart... and love your neighbor as yourself.** That makes you and me lawbreakers. And no lawbreaker is fit to inherit the kingdom of God.

But... Love never fails. God, in his great mercy, has revealed a love to us always acts in accordance to his will; a love that never fails. Look to Christ and look at his life and there you see all that has lacked in your. In Christ you see love as love is meant to be. In Christ you don't just find an example of always-perfect-never-failing love; you find your substitute. Where our love has lacked, Jesus' love has fulfilled God's law for you and me. Remember. God's law is summed up with word *love*. Love God. Love your neighbor. This Jesus always did. Never failed. He loved his Father perfectly by his every obedient action. Jesus' love never lacked in his life and conduct. From dirty lepers that fell at his feet to the executors who nailed his hands to the cross, Jesus' love never lapsed. His love was never self-serving. His love was always self-sacrificing. In fact, Jesus' sacrifice is what defines God's purest love— **"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins"** (1 John 4:10).

That's a love the never fails. Never falls short. That love is Jesus Christ. Let's read 1 Corinthians 13 through the lens of Jesus and his love. "If I speak in the whimsical words of man or as eloquently as angels, but know not Jesus and his love, I'm a clanking cymbal; a resounding gong. If I have all the wisdom and intellect, but know not the simple message of Jesus and his cross, I am nothing. Jesus is patient. Jesus is kind. He does not envy, he does not boast he is not proud. He is not rude. He is not self-seeking. He is not easily angered, he keeps no record of wrong." Especially think of that last phrase. **Love is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrong.** That's the kind of love God shows to us in Christ. He is as he revealed himself, **"Slow to anger and abounding in love"** (Deuteronomy 34:6). Psalm 130 praises the same Lord saying, **"If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness"** (Psalm 130:3,4).

If all we know about love is what we've observed in our world and in various relationships, then we don't know love, nor can we truly show it. But when we know Jesus Christ not only do know his love, we can actually show his love. The Holy Spirit working through his Word and sacraments, has connected you to Jesus Christ, the source of eternal love and eternal life. The Spirit has poured out his always-perfect-never-failing love into our hearts and lives. That love covers over the multitude and entirety of our sins, washes us clean from all our loveless acts and attitudes, and makes us new. By those same means, word and sacraments, the Holy works in you to produce abundant fruit. What is the fruit of the Spirit? **The fruit of the Spirit is love...**

That's what life is like for you, the Christian—saved by Jesus, born again of the Spirit—you know how to love. You even have the ability and motivation to love because you belong to Jesus. Those who belong to Jesus have crucified the loveless sinful nature with its passions and desires. And now, we live by the Spirit, and we love by the Spirit. We love, not as the world loves, not as our flesh loves, we love as the Spirit loves, because the Spirit dwells in us. And he even paints a beautiful picture for us in his word to guide as we love as God loved us. Here's that beautiful picture of love:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Amen.