

1-30-22 St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX “The Beauty of Agape Love”

*1 Cor.13:1 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. 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

(Helper texts: Jeremiah 1:4-10 - Luke 4: 21-30 )

Have you ever felt discounted? Like what you’re saying or doing was not important or even doubting yourself to do or say something important to you? Discounting of one’s self or others is a common theme in all three lessons today.

In our Gospel, Jesus is put down or discounted. In our first lesson, Jeremiah put himself down before God. In our second lesson, Paul describes the Holy Spirit’s gift of love for which we need help from God to accomplish. He says it rejoices with the truth.

The truth of our first lesson is that God is calling you and what God chooses is not inferior. God doesn’t call the equipped, but He equips the called.

The truth in our Gospel is that Jesus is the Son of God. When Jesus told the truth to the people of Nazareth about a prophet being sent to a non-Jewish persons for help, they went into a rage and tried to kill him.

Discounting ourselves or others fits in with the commandment not to bear false witness. If what is being said has the power to kill a person's reputation, then that also fits under "You shall not kill." You don't want to break those commandments.

Love, Paul says, needs to be our motivating force and not love that is self-seeking, but rather unconditional love, Christ-like love, sacrificial love. It is a love that is difficult to hold on to since we may struggle with our desire to hurt others, pay them back, retaliate for unfilled expectations, or be impatient with others.

In Greek, there are three words of love. Love, or *agape*, is different from friendship or *philos* type love. Love in this chapter is a different word from attractive love or *eros*, from which we get the word erotic. Love here is defined in the Message paraphrase as follows.

Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, [5] Doesn't force itself on others, Isn't always "me first," Doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, [6] Doesn't revel when others grovel, Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, [7] Puts up with anything, Trusts God always, Always looks for the best, Never looks back, But keeps going to the end. (1 Cor. 13:4-7-MsgB)

That can be difficult to offer after a long day when things haven't gone so well and you have a child make a demand on you or a spouse ask for help. We can't express that kind of love without God's help. It so much easier to attack, put someone down with sarcasm, displace our anger, or see things only our own perspective.

Roy Anthony Borges is a prison inmate who, becoming a Christian, had some hard lessons to unlearn. All his life he had been taught to hate his enemies, particularly within prison walls. One of his most vexing enemies was Rodney who stole his radio and headphones one day while Roy was playing volleyball in the prison yard. It was an expensive radio, a gift from his mother. The earphones had been a Christmas present from his sister. Roy was angry and wanted revenge, but as he prayed about it, it seemed to him that God was testing him. Day after day, Roy wanted to respond violently, to knock the wisecrack grin off Rodney's face, but Romans 12 (20-21) kept coming to

mind. That is where Paul wrote about avoiding vengeance, leaving it to God to settle the score. Roy began to look at Rodney more through God's eyes and have compassion on him. He began praying for him. He began trusting God to accomplish something in Rodney's life. By and by, Roy's hatred for Rodney began fading and he found himself helping his enemy and telling him about Jesus. Then one day, Roy later wrote, "I saw Rodney kneeling down next to his bunk reading his Bible, and I knew that good had overcome evil." (267, Nelson's Complete Book of Stories)

We need to ask God to help us to see people more the way He sees them. That was a lesson that Roy learned, but also one a school teacher learned. Her name was Dobie Gadiant. She'd taught school for 13 years but decided to travel across America and see the sights she'd taught her students about. Traveling alone in a truck with camper in tow, she launched out. One afternoon, while she was rounding a curve on I-5 near Sacramento in rush-hour traffic, a water pump blew out on her truck engine. She was tired, scared and alone. In spite of the traffic jam she caused, no one stopped to offer help. Leaning up against the trailer, she prayed, "Dear God, please send me an angel, preferably one with mechanical experience." Within four minutes, a huge Harley Davidson drove up, ridden by an enormous man sporting long, black hair, a beard and tattooed arms. With an incredible air of confidence, he jumped off and went to work on the truck, without even glancing at Dobie. Within another few minutes, he flagged down a larger truck, attached a tow chain to the frame of the disabled truck and camper and towed the whole 56-foot rig off the freeway onto a side street. There, he continued to work on the water pump. The teacher felt intimidated and too dumbfounded to talk especially after reading the words on the back of his leather jacket: Hell's Angels-California. As he finished his task, she finally got up enough courage to say, thanks.' Noting her surprise at the whole ordeal, he looked at her straight in the eye and advised, "Don't judge a book by its cover. You may not know who you're talking to." With that, he smiled, closed the hood of the truck, straddled the Harley and was gone as fast as he had appeared. (28, Nelson's Complete Book of Stories) Paul said, love "Trusts God always, always looks for the best, never looks back, but keeps going to the end."

An angel came to help her on a motorcycle. When I was on my internship back in 1970 in Niagara Falls, New York, I was asked to cover for a pastor who was out of town. The day I was supposed to preach and cover for him, I was sick myself. But I couldn't let him down so I went. During the Lord's Prayer, I blacked out and fell backwards down three steps in front of the altar. The next thing I remember is three men carrying me and one had wings on his lapel button. I actually thought I'd died. I was carried to the sacristy where they opened a window to get in some fresh air and came back to full consciousness. An angel did help me even though he was a pilot.

How can you love your neighbor as yourself without God's help? Jeremiah puts himself down. God said, "Don't do that" and calls him to a task of ministry – just like He calls each of us. When asked to be a prophet, to speak for God, Jeremiah says: *"Ah, Sovereign LORD, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."* But the LORD said to me, *"Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you..."*

In today's Gospel, Jesus is received with amazement. "Where did he get all this wisdom? He's just a carpenter. He's Joseph's son. The Gospel says, (22-23) *"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked. Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"* Jesus was met with skepticism.

We may feel threatened when the Holy Spirit approaches our hearts. Don't slam the door too fast. Try to be open to God's love for you so that you can pass it on. Remember Jesus' words in Revelation: *"Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone will open the door, I will come in and dine with him."* God wants our fellowship, our willingness to reach out and show His love and He will give us the help to do so, so we don't put anyone down including ourselves or others. We can choose to be careful with our words to others and about others as well as our actions. A major theme of the Epiphany season is reaching out to the world around us for God. All we need to do is ask Him to help us to do just that. Amen