

Pentecost 14 9/3/23
Romans 12:9-21 17A

LET LOVE BE GENUINE...LOVE ONE ANOTHER WITH BROTHERLY AFFECTION.

If I asked you to define love, how would you answer? Would you say it's an emotion, a feeling? Can you hold it in your hands and show, "Here is love"? Is the love you have for a grandchild, the same as the love you have for pizza? Maybe, you would look to actions – like when a disaster or catastrophe happens, and donations and aid pours in, as we've seen happening most recently in Maui.

The word "love" is used all over the world, in any number of different ways. There is even the hit song that proclaims, "I can't live in a world without love." So, I ask you: What is love? And, what does it mean to love one another as Christ has loved us?

I invite you to once again take a look at the Epistle reading for today; it's printed in your bulletin. It starts like this:

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.

What do you notice about those words of St. Paul? You're right, it's a series of commands -- telling us what to do.

And our lesson goes on with a whole bunch more of instructions about how we are to live:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil,

but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Paul is teaching us what genuine Christian love is. Paul is teaching us what it means to live as a little Christ to our neighbor -- loving one another with brotherly affection, living in harmony with one another, and so on.

Paul needs to teach us this because our love -- all too often -- is not that genuine. Take a look at yourself. Take a look at your life. What do the intentions of the thoughts of your heart say about you?

Let me begin with but one Commandment: What is the 6th Commandment? You know by now that when I teach the 6th Commandment in Catechism, I begin with a simple, but most profound question – When God gave us marriage, did he give us a blessing or...a curse? Now we're in Church, so you're going to answer, "Blessing." But, how our sinful flesh treats marriage as a curse; because rather than the husband loving his wife as Christ loved the Church and the wife obeying her husband; the flesh chooses to do what it desires, because that's what makes me feel good about myself

God has made us male and female; after all, that's the way He knit us together in our mother's wombs. But, now, we're a lot smarter than God – **or so we think** – and we can have gender affirming surgery to be anything we want; oh yes; it's all about how I feel about myself.

OK, you want me to move on from marriage? How about this then? Have you ever witnessed a couple of children playing with toys? They may have a whole room of toys, but what toy does one want? The one the other child is playing with. **Mine!** That feeling never leaves us; we never seem to outgrow it. Bigger house, bigger boat more expensive jeans than my

neighbor; that means I'm a better person, right??? Then there's that part of us that just delights – just brings us untold joy – when our neighbor “gets theirs; get's what's coming to'em”. Gossip, the wagging of the tongue? All about cutting down our neighbor to look better in the eyes -- the silly, sinful eyes -- of the unrepentant flesh.

It seems we live life all about “me”. In our sinful nature, we have nothing in us to love or to offer love.

To understand what genuine Christian love looks like, if we are going to show genuine love in our thoughts, words, and deeds, we need to start by looking at Jesus.

Genuine love, that's what Jesus gave the woman caught in adultery, when everybody wanted to stone her to death. That's what the Savior gave the Samaritan women at the well, when others wanted nothing to do with her. That's what the Good Shepherd gave the lost lambs – lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes. The judgment of man fell upon Him because He showed genuine love, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Lk 15:2).

That genuine love compelled Him take up His cross and carry it to Golgotha, carrying the sin of all the world, including those times when you did not love your neighbor as yourself and those times when you yourself were not all that loveable. He was crucified on that cross for those sins, loving to the end even those who cried for His death and those who drove the nails through His hands and feet. The Son of God did not ask, “What's in it for me, what do I get out of me; does this make me feel good about myself.” He simply loved us poor sinners until His dying breath, “It is finished.”

But, because Jesus did carry that cross, you are forgiven and given a new life in Him. Jesus is not just some role model that we should try to be like; He is the Savior who makes us new. In the new birth of your baptism, you are united to Christ, so that you die to sin and rise a new creation, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Christ lives in you, and you live in Christ, so that He can do His work of loving through you.

That's what our reading from Romans 12 is all about. Its all about how we, as little Christs, live together. So I invite you to take these verses to heart and put them into action.

What will being patient in tribulation mean for you this week? Can you rejoice in the hope you have in Christ, even in the midst of tribulation? How can you be constant in prayer this week?

And especially here, in the family of {Zion} Concordia, who among us is rejoicing? Rejoice with them. Who among us is weeping? Weep with them. Who needs in encouraging, so that you can encourage them?

This is done in the home when husband and wife love and honor one another, so that marriage is the blessing God created it to be. We love your children, reflecting and shining Christ them in our expectations, our patience with them, our forgiving them.

That's what genuine love does – it doesn't tear up, it builds up. Genuine love doesn't criticize, it helps. Genuine love doesn't gossip or curse, it speaks holy words. Genuine love forgives, and that means it keeps no – **no** – record of wrongs, because when sin is forgiven, what is there to remember; it's gone.

Being Christ to your neighbor isn't easy, is it? Some people simply give us no reason to love them. Heed those words of Paul, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (v. 18). If people choose

to curse, mock, hate you for Jesus, notice Paul doesn't tell us it's OK to hate them back or refuse to love those who don't love us. We have the mind of Christ. He is at work in us as we hear His Word and eat His life-giving Body and Blood, that we may love them, just as He loved those who cried for His death and drove the nails through His hands and feet.

We love because Jesus first loved us and Jesus is what genuine love will always look like (cf. 1 Jn 4:19).

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.