

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

VOL. XXXI, No. 8 A PARISH IN THE CLASSICAL ANGLICAN TRADITION MARCH 10TH, 2020

FROM THE RECTOR

I Cor. 13 -- The Bible's most terrifying passage

Somebody recently asked me why my sermons so often end with a reflection on our Christian obligation to love our fellow men. I replied that it is the subject of the most frightening passage in the whole of the Bible: The 13th Chapter of the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians.

Some might find it somewhat peculiar to contend that this passage – the Epistle appointed for Quinquagesima Sunday and found upon Page 122 of the BCP – should strike terror into our hearts.

It begins with the words: Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal . . ."

And it expresses such beautiful thoughts about the centrality of love to the Christian message and the importance of love in the human experience that many people take it as a comfort rather than the contrary.

In fact it is such a favorite that, in modern translation – "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love" – it has become a favorite scripture reading at weddings.

Actually, the members of the Corinthian Church would find it decidedly odd to hear this passage read on a joyful occasion like a wedding because there is nothing lovey-dovey about it. It is, in fact, a stern admonition.

Probably the best explanation for our failure to recognize the frightening nature of the message encapsulated in I Corinthians 13 is our modern inability to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest what we read.

Part of the problem is that Greek, the language in which Paul wrote, has different words for the various types of love – love for siblings, love for parents, erotic love, etc. The word Paul uses in the epistle is "agape" which means love for humanity or for one's fellow men.

Even so, Paul's meaning should be clear from the context in which he uses the word. However these days we tend to skim our reading material – the Bible included – as casually as we skim the back of a cornflakes box at the breakfast table.

Thus, when we take the trouble to pause and ponder the things we have read, we frequently discover we've grasped the wrong end of the stick. And nowhere is this more apparent than in I Corinthians 13.

The King James Bible with commendable precision translates the word "agape" as "charity." And the passage expounds the direconsequences of not loving one's fellow men in a Christian manner. Bereft of this quality of charitable love, all of our other Christian virtues, he declares, are absolutely worthless.

It does not matter, for example, how hard we work to spread the Gospel, if we are not acting in a spirit of love for our fellow men, our endeavors are useless. It doesn't matter how great we are as preachers, teachers, singers and church builders. If we do have love towards our fellowmen are talents are valueless.

In other words, if there is one ability we need to cultivate above all, it is the ability to love our fellow men, no matter how unlovely they might seem to be.

This is not an option. It is a solemn obligation. Nothing else we have to offer can make up for its lack. It is a thought that should terrify us whenever we find ourselves griping about other people.

The notion of "Agape" doesn't come naturally

And while I'm on the subject, a radio talk show caller not so long ago ventured to suggest that all would be right with American society if only people would love each other a bit more.

It's hard to quarrel with that. Clearly, if drug dealers loved addicts a bit more they wouldn't enslave them with narcotics. If muggers loved their victims a bit more they wouldn't rob and maim and kill them.

And if, for that matter, If rioters loved their neighbors a

Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List and guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, call the parish office (410) 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Eileen, Rebecca, Catherine, Richard✕, Janis, Parisa, Daniel, Leona, Rachel, Elizabeth, Kim, Dorothy, Donna, Skip, Dan, Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Heidi, Alan, Terry, Helen, Linda, John, Neal, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Jan, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Marie, Jim, Joanna, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John Tom, Michell, Jack, Lewey, Stephen, Pamela, David, Wade, Sifa, Eileen, Ravi, Theresa, Lisa, Larry Ricard, Judy & Scott

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Cameron, Caroline, Karen, Ardis, Mavis, Michael, Melba, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Chip, Elizabeth, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Jacob, Casey, Beth, Kath, Rebecca, Colin & Christian.

IN MEMORIAM: Elizabeth Smith, Raymond Schulte & Pamela M. Austin,

THOSE WHO MOURN: The Smith family, The Schulte family, and Diane Austin Schmalser & family

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt. Col. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army.

bit more they wouldn't burn their homes and pillage their property. And so *ad infinitum*.

There is, however, nothing profound about this thought. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that loving each other a bit more is the answer to almost all society's ills – at least those that aren't occasioned by accident or infirmity.

The problem is not identifying the problem. If that's all there was to it, the Flower Children would have solved things back in the 1960s.

Trouble is that while we know things would be very much better if we all did love people a bit more, the sad fact of the matter is that we don't love each other even the tiniest bit more. These days it seems that we love each other an awful lot less.

Nor should we find this entirely surprising. There is nothing very natural about people loving other people in a generic sense – beyond our immediate relatives and, perhaps, the folks in our own social circle. As for the wider world, however, most of its inhabitants are definitely suspect.

So where does this notion that we should all love one

another come from? The answer is that Jesus commanded his followers to love their fellow men as much as they love themselves.

But the fact that Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors is a sure indication that loving people outside our immediate circle of family and friends does not come naturally or easily. If it came naturally he wouldn't have bothered to mention it. If it came easily, he wouldn't have made such a big deal about it.

The fact that Jesus wants us to love our fellow men sets things straight as far as Christians are concerned. But the talk show caller was not a Christian. Indeed, she spoke disparagingly of Christians as she was making her point.

It is something of a paradox that so many non-Christians subscribe to the notion that it is natural for people to love one another. How could they possibly have gotten such a bizarre idea? After all, there is nothing, for example, in evolutionary theory to lead them to believe it to be so. It certainly runs contrary to the course of the history of the 20th century.

Nor does the concept of altruistic love as a natural phenomenon square with a general rejection of moral absolutes or the adoption of "situation ethics." The idea that there are no moral absolutes and that ethics change according to the situation is the rationale

for treating some people in less fairly than others. Actually, such thinking engenders feelings quite the opposite of love in that it permits us to put our own interests above those of others.

How can it be, then, that so many non-Christians subscribe to the idea that it is natural for people to love one another when, in fact, such a concept runs counter to all they believe?

Nobody, however, should be surprised that, as Christianity is driven further and further from the public square, we are loving each other less not more. **GPH**

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The Lenten Series begins

This year's Lenten Series continues on Wednesday, March 4th at 6.45 PM after Evening Prayer. It will consist of five hourly sessions, and concludes on Wednesday, April 1st.

Entitled "Anglicans: Who we are. Where we came from. And where we are going", it will explore the identity, development and future of the Anglican Church both here in America and world-wide.

As usual we will be offering a hearty soup, the best bread in Baltimore, beverages and food for thought. If you feel you need more, you are welcome to bring a sandwich.

St Stephen's Anglican Church

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www.ststeve.com

The Very Rev. Guy P Hawtin, Dean & Rector

The Rev. John Novicki, Vicar ·

Associate Rectors:

The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. C. Daniel Bursi,

The Rev. Dr. Norman Flowers,

The Rev. M. Wiley Hawks & The Rev. Mark Newsome,

Mrs Happy Riley, Director of Pastoral Care

& Wedding Coordinator

SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Sung Eucharist

9.15am: Sung Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11am: Sung Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

Choral Services (as announced) – evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club

Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle

Noon: Bible Study

Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

The Lenten Study continues

Wednesday, March 11th, 1.00 PM the Parish Hall

The Vestry Meeting

Wednesday, 7.00 PM, March 18th

Ladies Who Lunch

Noon, Wednesday, March 18th

Venue: Kooper, Padonia Road

Information: Call Sara Douglas at 410-560-9026

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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