

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Epiphany 4; January 30 & 31, 2022

The Carnival cruise ship, Triumph, can hold over 4,000 people. It has 14 decks and 18 elevators that can take you from deck to deck, to jewelry stores and gift shops, to mini golf, to a casino with 60 slot machines, to an underground-themed arcade, to spas and saunas, to the sky lounge. If hungry, you have burger joints, Mexican restaurants, seafood, a pizza place, coffee bars, dozens of breakfast places, or you can order room service. It has 4 pools, including a water slide that stretches down 3 decks. In case of a Caribbean thunderstorm, a retractable roof covers everyone up. This ship lacks absolutely nothing. It is a floating paradise.

On November 10, 2013, the cruise ship Carnival Triumph experienced an engine room fire while the vessel was sailing approximately 150 miles off the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula. The ship's automatic fire extinguishing systems activated and the fire was contained to the aft engine room. There were no casualties or injuries to any of the guests or crew. However, the engine fire led to a power outage on the ship. No power meant that the ship had no propulsion system. It was dead in the water and the ship was drifting aimlessly in the ocean waters. The ship was operating on a very small amount of emergency generator power. The power outage took out most of the ship's refrigerators holding red meat, seafood, chicken, dairy and ice. No engines powering air conditioning, pool pumps, or bathrooms. Passengers dragged mattresses onto decks to escape stuffy cabins that had no air conditioning. No power meant that the sewage system on the ship began to backup in parts of the ship and in some cabins. You can only imagine the smells that were on that ship. It took 5 days for the ship to be towed to the nearest port. Without the engines all those amazing amenities sat useless. No one could enjoy anything the ship offered.

God has given many different gifts to believers and to the Christian Church. The chapter before our text speaks about many of those different blessings. Paul says here that you can have all of those incredible blessings, but if you don't have love, you have nothing. He writes: **"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 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 do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."**

As you look at those words of Paul, you can't help but ask the question: *"Whose love is Paul talking about in these words from 1 Corinthians 13?"* The answer is: *God's Love*. These words were written to the Christians living in Corinth who had trouble getting along with each other and not loving each other as they should. It seems that some were proud of the spiritual gifts they were given to serve Jesus. However, they were these spiritual gifts to inflate their own egos instead of serving each other as members of the body of Christ. In other words, they were flaunting their gifts to make themselves look better than someone else. There were other people who were arguing and dividing people. So, Paul needs to address some of these issues.

In order to once again get people focused in the right direction, he is going to take them back to Jesus' love. If they are going to use their gifts and talents to build up the body of Christ, they need to go back to the one who gave the body of Christ those gifts. Paul is not only speaking to them, but also to us. He wants all to know just how **patient** God is with us. Instead of lashing out in anger every time we do something wrong, God forgives us again and again. God is **kind**. He demonstrates mercy by not treating us the way that we deserve. He is not too **proud** to die a criminal's death. He doesn't **boast** about how much power that he has as God. He is **not self-seeking**. He didn't come to this world to see how big he could build up his name and his power. Jesus keeps **no record of wrong**. If he did, who could stand before God. We would be in serious trouble. Instead, he **rejoices with the truth**. Think of the parable of the lost lamb brought back to Jesus. Jesus described that joy with the words: **"And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."** (Luke 15:5-7) What incredible love Jesus has for us!

It is that kind of love that Jesus wants us to reflect in our lives, in our marriages, with our neighbors and co-workers. When we see that, we now can apply these words of Paul to each of us. **"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not**

envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, 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.”

I would like to share a story/a parable with you.

*A fifth-grade teacher, a Christian, named Miss Thompson worked hard to treat all her students with love. One year her ability to love and show kindness was severely challenged by a boy named Teddy. Teddy was often untidy, smelly, listless, glassy-eyed and not liked by the other kids. She found herself not liking Teddy and that was not fair considering the records she had seen. **1st grade:** Shows promise, poor home life. **2nd grade:** Could do better. Mother very ill. **3rd grade:** Good boy. Too serious. Mother died. **4th grade:** Slow, well behaved. Father shows no interest.*

Christmas came and the kids brought the presents to their teacher. Teddy’s was wrapped in brown paper with too much scotch tape. She opened it and out fell a bracelet with some rhinestones missing and a bottle of cheap perfume, half opened. The class laughed. The teacher put on the bracelet, held it too the light and show how it sparkled. She put on the perfume and told the class she liked its smell. After everyone left, Teddy stood around, and finally had enough nerve to tell Miss Thompson, “You smell like my mom and her bracelet looks good on you too.”

When Teddy left the room, she broke down and cried, vowing to show more love to Teddy. Teddy improved. Miss Thompson received letters from Teddy, second in the class in high school. From the university, he wrote he was first in his class. Four years later, an invitation came to the wedding- from Teddy Stallard, M.D. asking her to sit where his mother would have sat if she were alive.

If human love can change people and make them more loving, how much greater is the love of Christ that can change us and it does. May God help us to see the difference that God’s love makes in our lives. It is the power of his love that enable us to enjoy all the blessings that God gives us. It is that love that gives us true life. May God help us to show that love in everything we do. Amen.