

1 Corinthians 13:1–13; Luke 4:21–30

Note: this Homily assumes that both the Gospel (Luke 4:21–30) and New Testament passage (1 Corinthians 13:1–13) have been read during the Service. The scripture passages quoted below are from the NIV (1984). If you use a different version at your church, it may help parishioners if you read the same passages from your church Bibles.

Recall a time when you've tried to speak with kindness and gentleness, but the person you spoke to just dismissed your words. In fact, they might even have tried to put you down. Two of our Bible readings for today help us reflect on that situation.

The Gospel reading for today (Luke 4:21-30) shows us the response of those who lived in Jesus' home town of Nazareth when he taught them from their Bible. Luke gives us 2 initial responses - they really like Jesus' manner - they noticed he spoke gracefully. At the same time, they trivialised his words saying: "Isn't this Joseph's son?" - he's just a carpenter - what would he know. They'd already heard about the miracles Jesus had done in other villages, but they brush that aside, because they think they know him. They've pre-judged him and end up rejecting him. Not a loving response.

The reading from Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13, may have sounded very familiar to you - it's often read at a Wedding Service. Perhaps it may be a surprise to realise that the author, Paul, did not write it for a wedding. He was just writing to the Church in Corinth. From what he's written earlier in this letter to that church, it seems that they liked to draw attention to themselves, especially at church. No genuine interest in one another, but just in their own performance. Consider the early chapters in this letter: in chapter 1 they formed groups at church following

1 Corinthians 13:1–13; Luke 4:21–30

particular leaders, with each group thinking they were better than the others at church. In chapter 2 they try to impress one another with their eloquence and clever words. Then in chapter 5 they think it's impressive that they tolerate immorality. In chapter 6 some of them even take their fellow church members to court. Chapter 12 shows that while God's Spirit has given them gifts to equip them to serve one another, they use these same gifts to big-note themselves at church. It's as if they are saying 'church needs me, but it does not need you!'

Verses 14-15 of chapter 12 really highlight the problem:

14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.

and in vs 27 Paul teaches them:

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

We hardly need to be told these behaviours are out of place among God's people. Yet, it's so easy to find ourselves thinking, "At least I'm not like that". It's easy to compare ourselves with others ... and think of ourselves as being better - though we'd never say that!

After exposing their divisive behaviour, Paul closes chapter 12 promising:

"And now I will show you the most excellent way."

With those words, chapter 13 comes like a breath of fresh, cool air.

In vs 1-3 Paul points out that no matter how brilliant, wise, impressive, or valued they are, our gifts are meaningless unless we use them in love. We see in vs. 5 that love is not self-seeking – that must have been a

1 Corinthians 13:1–13; Luke 4:21–30

severe shock for the Corinthians. Love is not about my skills or achievements - it's not about me! Love is about how I treat you. Paul puts it this way:

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 is not limited to a feeling; love is about how we treat each other. Love is not restricted to just those I get along with; or those in my family. Love is how Christians are to relate together - you might remember Jesus' words to his disciples in John 13:34-35 -

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Sadly, most of us know difficulty and breakdown in our own families - and no doubt you have seen it in your church family too. Let us pray that God might work in our lives to give us the desire and the ability to love, even those we struggle with. Sadly, even though we may love them, that love may not be returned - Jesus knew that all too well. He understands your struggle. Your sadness. He does not promise everything will sort out. He does call his disciples to relate to others with love, regardless of the response.

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This chapter concludes with the affirmation that faith, hope and love will endure into eternity. The greatest of these is love. The fruit of love in our life is evidence of the Spirit's work, transforming us into the character of Christ. None of our achievements will endure past the grave. Love will. Let's pray that God would transform us and give us the will and desire to put our self-interest to death, and that he would clothe us with love in our relationships. Thank God that he loves us with a love like this! That he is: patient, kind; not envious, not boastful or proud.

Thank God that he is not self-seeking, not easily angered, and does not keep a record of our wrongs. Thank him that he is trustworthy, faithful and perseveres. To him be the glory.