

It's Not All You Need

January 31, 2016

1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13

On June 25th, 1967, the Beatles performed their song, "Love is All You Need." The song was the closing number on the television show, "Our World." This two and a half hour extravaganza was the first live global television link in history. Over four hundred million people in twenty-five countries watched the show and heard the song.

John Lennon wrote the lyrics. He described the piece as "a propaganda song." Lennon described himself as a "revolutionary artist." He said his art was "dedicated to change."

"There's nothing you can do that can't be done," Lennon wrote. "It's easy," the Beatles crooned. "All you need is love."

Nearly fifty years later, it doesn't seem quite so easy. Warm feelings and sappy slogans have not quite landed us in utopia.

On the surface, First Corinthians thirteen sounds like a preview of Lennon's lyrics. If I do not have love, Paul writes in that first paragraph, I am nothing at all. If only we would all join hands and sing Beatles' tunes, our problems would be solved. Is that it?

No, that's not it.

Love is not all we need.

This section of First Corinthians is about the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. "*To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit,*" Paul tells us, "*for the common good.*" The Corinthian Christians were wonderfully gifted Christians. But they focused on the lesser gifts and forgot about the greatest gift of all.

Love is not all we need. But it is the greatest spiritual gift.

What do we Christians mean by "love?" The Bible always starts with Jesus. First John four, verse nine, says this. "*God's love was revealed to us in this way: God sent his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*" Love starts with God's action.

The New Testament is clear. God's love is not primarily a feeling. God's love is primarily an action. God's love is a very specific action. That action has a name. His name is Jesus.

We don't worship a god who loves us in theory. We don't worship a god who loves us from a safe distance. We don't worship a god who waits for us to make the first move. We don't worship a god who loves us some days and not others. We worship the God who loves us so much that God would rather die than live without us.

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And it is a gift, not an accomplishment.

In Romans five, verse six, Paul reminds us that "*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*" God's love is not a manufactured feeling. God's love is not an obligation to be

met. God's love is what we're made to be filled with. As N. T. Wright has said, God's love is not our duty but rather our destiny.

We have become grandparents again in the last few days. I have meditated again on the mystery and majesty of God's love. A little stranger has invaded our world. He is a trembling bundle of basic human need. He is the cause of anxiety and lost sleep. In practical terms, he's more than a bit of a bother.

Yet, when I held him, I was overcome with joy. I didn't have to work up a feeling. I didn't have to review the regulations. The love arrived in me, fully formed. It is a gift from God. It is a small taste of God's love for you and me. God is more than passing fond of us.

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Love is always an action. First Corinthians thirteen is not a flowery hymn about theoretical love. This is the action plan for loving others the way God loves us. God's love is poured into us so that it can flow out of us.

One danger in this chapter is that it might be reduced to a propaganda song. The other danger is that it might feel like a burden rather than a blessing. Our main task, however, is simply to let the Holy Spirit of God's love flow through us.

I was watering some new trees on the church yard in Lincoln. Two confirmation students were helping. I sent one to turn on the faucet. The other waited with me for the water to flow. Nothing happened. I complained aloud about low water pressure. I wondered if the student had gotten sidetracked. I worried about a leaky hose.

The second student was quiet. Then she said, "It might help if you took your foot off that kink in the hose."

That's our spiritual challenge as well. Can I get out of the way long enough to let God's love flow through me? We've been working on that over the past few weeks. Today we'll take some time to identify ways you can serve in ministries at Emanuel. Please read the instructions and fill out the inventory. Then put the completed inventory on the font. It may take a few weeks, but we'll get back to you with more information and resources. In the meantime, if you're anxious to start on something new, just call the church office. We'll get you hooked up.

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And it is especially important for those who are sure they cannot be loved. You may know that one of our members, Dwight Rogers, has run afoul of the law. He is in the Pottawattamie County jail. I have written to Dwight, and he has written back. I am not concerned about his guilt or innocence at this point. That is for others to decide.

Instead, we are called to love him as a member of our church family. I will certainly visit him at the jail. He shares this request. "I really could use some friendly communication." If you would like to send a card or letter to Dwight, I will be glad to help you with that communication. We are the church. We do not shoot our wounded. We love by the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Love is not all we need. But it is the greatest spiritual gift. And it is our honor to be channels for that gift in the world.

Let's pray...

Pastor Lowell Hennigs

Emanuel Lutheran Church
Council Bluffs, Iowa