

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

⁸ Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. ² Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. ³ But whoever loves God is known by God.

⁴ So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.” ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

⁷ But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. ⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

⁹ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. ¹² When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

In the December 24, 1996, issue of *Upper Room*, Kermit Long of Arizona has a moving story about one Christmas evening in Chicago.

"A gentle snowfall added to the already magical, mystical beauty of the season. I had just finished presiding over the first of our candlelight services. Rather than waiting in the church until the late hour for the second service, I visited in the hospitals and then roamed the few stores still open for late shoppers.

"I saw some people in a flower shop and joined them. Soon a young boy of about 7 or 8 came into the shop. His clothes were torn, and his tennis shoes had holes in them. He walked purposefully over to the counter and asked the shopkeeper, 'Do you have any roses for my mother for 10 cents?'

"The man replied, 'Wait just a moment and I'll see what we can do for you.' After serving the other waiting customers, the owner turned back to the little boy and said, 'I have good news for you. On Christmas Eve, we have a special on roses for young fellows who want them for their mothers.' Taking the lad's dime, he placed a dozen beautiful, long-stemmed red roses in his arms. With a big smile on his face, the boy left the flower shop and headed home. Those of us who looked on were warmed by what we had seen, and I know the shopkeeper felt the blessing of God for his generosity."

Can you imagine what this selfless act did for that little boy? Surely he went away from that flower shop feeling valued. He wasn't shoved away, or put down because he was poor, sending him the message that he has worth in this world. "Love builds up," is one of my favorite lessons in the Bible. Love is Paul's most important concept in describing how believers properly relate to one another, and it is so critical to his corrective lesson to the Corinthians, to whom he was writing in today's text, about their interaction with each other, which was a little shaky.

Paul was trying to help the congregation in Corinth get through a squabble. It appears that some would have liked to be free to eat food that had been used in the worship of idols, which was against Jewish law. Since they knew that these idols were no threat to the one true God, that is to say, that this **food was just food**, then there was no reason to waste good food. However, others in the church family still worried about the significance of the meat being sacrificed to worship idols. These folks believed that to eat food that had been used in the worship of idols was to lessen their devotion to God. So, what was this church family to do?

Paul agreed that there was nothing wrong with eating this food except that to do so, it would show that they did not take seriously the concerns of those who still worried that this would link them with idol worshippers. Therefore, if love builds up, then those who ordinarily ate the meat, would not eat it even though those concerned about eating the food were misinformed. Love for one another took priority over principles.

Paul recognizes that love is so very important for Christian living and for all relationships that he devotes a whole chapter to defining love.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a, Paul tells us,

“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.

“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. Love never fails.”

Paul tells us in today’s scripture reading that this thing called love is more important than knowledge. Knowledge can make us look good and feel important, but we can all too easily develop an arrogant, know-it-all attitude, if we are not careful. Arrogance lets the door open for people with strong opinions and an unwillingness to listen to and learn from God and others.

But that does not mean that having knowledge is a bad thing; we just need God’s knowledge and God’s wisdom. We can obtain God’s knowledge only by loving him. In James 3:17-18 we read, “Real wisdom, God’s wisdom, **begins with a holy life,**” that is to say to love, to worship and to obey God. Continuing with James 3:17, “and it is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next—not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.”

One day when our granddaughter was a toddler, my daughter-in-law, Vicki, sent me a message telling me that our granddaughter, Felicity, knew her colors, could recite almost all of the alphabet and could count from one to ten. The following Friday evening I got a video from our son, Nick. At the beginning of the video I could hear my son coaxing Felicity to count to ten, and then all of a sudden she slowly was counting to ten. At the end, her daddy said, “Yea!!!!” and Felicity was beaming with a smile and clapping for herself.

It was such a sweet video that I watched it more than once. It got me thinking—it was great that Felicity could say her numbers from one to ten, but I wondered if she really knew what numbers were. Over time, I knew she would learn that counting was more than reciting numbers.

Eventually, she would learn to do many things with numbers that would help her throughout her life.

Likewise, not only can we acquire the knowledge or the wisdom of God by loving him, but more importantly, we can know and be known by God only when we do something with our knowledge—must importantly, modeling him by showing love to others. We read in 1 John 4:7-8, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

If it is not clear to us from today’s scripture reading, Paul’s description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 makes it quite clear that love is not just a sentiment, not just a feeling, not merely a sort of mood. Love works; it acts; it does things; and the chief thing it does is to enlighten, build up, cause growth in each person who participates in it and who is engaged by it.

Mr. Lee was terribly overweight. So his doctor put him on a diet.

"I want you to eat regularly for two days, then skip a day, and repeat this procedure for two weeks. The next time I see you, you'll have lost at least five pounds."

When Mr. Lee returned, he shocked the doctor by having lost nearly 60 pounds. "Why, that's amazing!" the doctor said. "Did you follow my instructions?"

Mr. Lee nodded. "I'll tell you though, I thought I was going to drop dead that third day."

"From hunger, you mean?"

"No, from skipping."

Love entails a lot of skipping.

Love is not a one-way street: You cannot get rid of it; it will not run out. You can give it away recklessly, extravagantly, and it is never exhausted, nor is anyone shorted by giving it away. It does not have to be saved. It not only benefits the recipient, but it also returns in a richer form than it was sent to the donor so that the donor becomes a recipient along with the other.

Love works. Love changes circumstances and people. The one loved is never again the same; and the one who loves is never again the same. That means then that love is a transaction—but not something to be negotiated. It is not open to bargaining.

Love, once under way, takes on a life of its own. Like the grace on which it is built, it surprises. Love restores, love enlarges, and love makes whole. Most often that is what happens with love. But love is not a magic wand; love can be scorned and rejected.

Love does not purposely lead someone the wrong way. In today’s scripture, Paul does not seem concerned about what impact eating the food might have on those outside the church. He is, however, concerned about what sort of witness is made when others see the Christians fighting with one another.

Studies show that non-Christians are turned off to God, faith, and the church, when they see Christians showing anything but love towards each other. Love does not cause another person to stumble or to reject God.

Author, Virginia Mollenkott, wrote the following story in her book, "What Gives You Faith?"

“Questions of Faith. I love to watch students come alive. One of the courses I teach is freshman English, and that's a place where you can empower people. They often come to you beaten down. All anyone had done was tell them how bad they were in English. You try to encourage them to write about who they are, to talk about who they are, and you show some interest in them. You show them that they have something interesting in their lives. They're people.

January 31, 2021 - One...No More Than That

“Before I pass back their first graded paper, I give them a little speech: ‘This grade is not for you. This grade is for a piece of work you turned in.’

“Then I ask them if they want to know what I think of them, and usually they want to. So, I continue, ‘I think you're made in the image of God and of inestimable worth. There's no way anything I could put in my grade book could ever begin to estimate you.’_

I learned to do this after I read Flannery O'Connor's story about the boy who went up in the attic and drew a circle with a big "F" in the middle because he hadn't been doing well in school, and hanged himself over the "F." He didn't distinguish between the grade he was getting and who he was.

For me, the meaning of life is to share with people the wonderful news that we are the daughters and sons of God.

God likes to watch his sons and daughters come alive.

We have a responsibility to each other to love one another, to build one another up, to testify through our love for each other that God is love, and that God's love is available to everyone. Amen.