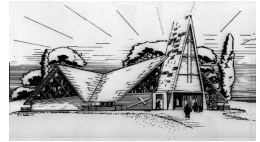




Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon- Sunday Estomihi
The greatest Spiritual Gift:
Divine Love!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in 1 Corinthians 13:

- **1** If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
- **2** If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
- **3** And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body (to be burned) so that I can boast, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

- **4** Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant,
- **5** does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*,
- **6** does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices together with the truth;
- **7** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- **8** Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are* tongues, they will cease; if *there is* knowledge, it will be done away.

- **9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part;
- **10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.
- **11** When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.
- **12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.
- **13** But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

- Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, open our ears, and give us of Your Love so that we will share Your divine Love with others. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved in Christ!**

- In the church the Holy Spirit has given a variety of gifts, a variety of services or ministries, a variety of workings or activities to its members. Different members

of the Body of Christ have received different gifts, a variety of services and manifold workings. All of these gifts, services and activities were given for one reason only: To serve the congregation, to serve the building up of the true Body of Christ!

- The church does not only consist of pastors and maybe church council members or those in leadership roles. No. Each and every member has received gifts from God to help building up His Kingdom, even if it is only to be able to listen and to pray! Since we have been baptised into Christ, we have a new Master to follow. Since then our first priority in our life should be to build up God's Kingdom. That does not mean that we should stop working in our communities. Quite to the contrary, God wants us to work in our vocations faithfully and trustworthy, serving others rather than ourselves.

- This takes us to the highest spiritual gift, which God has given to all of those He has baptised, to all those He has forgiven their sins, which all of us Christians should strive to accomplish as much as possible, namely the agape- Love, divine Love, the Love! As we have received the forgiveness of sins from Christ, we have received His divine Love, the agape-Love.

- All the other gifts, ministries, services and activities, like playing organ, like cleaning the church, like serving tea or decorating the hall, or visiting the sick or giving money or praying for others, or preaching and teaching etc., all of these good gifts need at best be accompanied by the highest gift, namely agape- Love TO BENEFIT THE BUILDING UP OF CHRIST'S BODY! If you make use of all those gifts, services and activities, but agape-Love is missing, it will not benefit the true building up of the Church of Christ! Please see the difference here, the building up of the Church that belongs to Christ, not my own version of the church! He is the head who drives and determines what His church should be. In this sense it is not *my* church. We are not owners of the church. It always belongs to Christ. He is the foundation of the church. Without the truth of Christ there is no church. He has installed the church by giving of His agape- Love to us. We live out of His divine Love!

- Without agape-Love, without the way of Christ's Love, without the attitude of His Love driving me, using my gifts of the Spirit will still be all about me! I would be building up my Self misusing God's spiritual gifts! Then I would be using these gifts of God to showcase my strengths against other peoples weaknesses. Whenever I use these ministries to brag about what I have accomplished, it will not benefit the whole, namely the Body of Christ. This was the problem of the congregation in Corinth. We know, this problem is still with us! Each and everyone of us has to deal with this issue Paul is addressing here.
- We have to ask ourselves today: I have received some gifts and abilities, some talents from God, what am I doing with these my gifts? Am I maybe neglecting them completely? Am I withdrawing them completely from the congregation or from the community? Who is getting the benefit of them? Am I maybe using them only for my Self? And if I am using them in the congregation, is it my intention to build up the congregation, to help my neighbour, or is it about ME?
- Christ's Love does not seek its own [5]! And please, it does not even mention, that it does not only seeks its own, but also cares for others. No. Seeking its own is completely excluded! It is absolutely radical not about me! This goes against the fibres of our whole society which emphasises that loving the Self is essential to love others! With agape-Love there is not even the slightest hidden agenda of getting something out for ME! Therefore it is not resentful, at all! If agape- Love suffers wrong doing, it does not retaliate at all, it does not wish evil on the wrongdoer, not at all! Its not about me! Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him, "forgive them for they don't know what they are doing!"
- And yet, this does not mean, on the other hand, that Christ's-Love is the same as absolute tolerance. It can be the very opposite of what the world understands under tolerance! Agape-Love has boundaries! The boundary of agape-Love is found in verse 6: "***does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices together with the truth;***". Agape-Love rejoices together with the truth, exclusively only with the truth. It will not stand with anything against the Will of God, with anything against His commandments! That is, it will not rejoice with sin. It will never bless sin! This

is where a lot of confusion is found today in the church.

- In this regard Christ's Love will stand out in the world! Yet, it will not be interpreted as love by the world. Agape-Love will be interpreted as being *intolerant* by the world, because it will not rejoice with evil, not with sin, only with the truth! Therefore, Paul has to reveal to the Corinthians that this way is in fact the *perfect* way! If you evaluate it from the world's point of view, you will never recognise it as being perfect!! Thus its true value as Love is hidden before the world!
- Only in this context may we understand verse 7: ***“Love bears all things (together with the truth), believes all things (together with the truth), hopes all things (together with the truth), endures all things (together with the truth).”*** The world, in its blindness, in its foolishness, not understanding and seeing that Christ's Love is perfect, will even go against this agape-Love! It will attack it, just as it has attacked Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. The world does not want to recognise that it is evil. The world despises the doctrine of original sin. It fights against it with all it has. Therefore, we find the strangest thing on earth happened, that the truly loving Christ was attacked. He bore all things and endured all things for our sakes! And so the Love we have received and receive from Him, here in His Divine Service, empowers us to begin to do the same, to at least strive after doing the same! That is worthy of striving after!
- This attitude of Christ's Love, that is given to us, will never end! What we receive here from Christ is a gift from eternity which will never end. Even faith and hope will end one day, when we will rise to see what we have believed, but Christ's Love will never end. It will always be with us. It will continue to drive and motivate us forever! Such a wonderful gift Christ gives to us through His means! It is the exact attitude which has always been and will always be between God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Love of Christ is the attitude of heaven which you all have received in your hearing, today! Praise be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit! **Amen.**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
Amen.*