Lutheran Church of the Master
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor
January 30 & 31, 2010
4th Sunday after the Epiphany

"… then just what does that love look like?"

An epiphany ought to be a surprise. The prophet Jeremiah is surprised that God would call a youth, but Jeremiah has been in God's sight for a long, long time. Jesus is popular in many places but maybe not at home. Love, which seems so familiar, is really a radical invitation to care for others on their terms. How will love surprise us this day?

PRAYER OF THE DAY
Almighty and ever-living God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and love; and that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

FIRST READING *Jeremiah 1:4–10*
4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."
6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." 7
But the LORD said to me,
"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
8 Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD."
9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,
"Now I have put my words in your mouth.
10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."

PSALM *Psalm 71:1–6*
In you, O LORD, have I | taken refuge;*
let me never | be ashamed.
2**In your righteousness, deliver me and | set me free;***
incline your ear to | me and save me.
3Be my strong rock, a castle to | keep me safe;*
you are my crag | and my stronghold.
4**Deliver me, my God, from the hand | of the wicked,***

from the clutches of the evildoer and | the oppressor. R

5 For you are my hope, | O Lord GOD,*
my confidence since | I was young.

6 I have been sustained by you ever since I was born;
from my mother's womb you have | been my strength;*
my praise shall be al- | ways of you. R

SECOND READING *1 Corinthians 13*

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a
clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand 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 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,
but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It
does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in
wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things,
endures all things.

8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they
will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know only in part, and we
prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When
I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became
an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will
see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully
known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

GOSPEL *Luke 4:21–30*

21 Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22 All
spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said,
"Is not this Joseph's son?" 23 He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb,
'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we
have heard you did at Capernaum.'" 24 And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the
prophet's hometown. 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah,
when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all
the land; 26 yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 There
were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed
except Naaman the Syrian." 28 When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29
They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town
was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and
went on his way.

So … if the preacher was right last week … and if Paul really meant what he said in this letter to the Church about love … if it really is the case that you and I can have everything else right and do everything else right … but if we don't have love, we are absolutely wrong … "then just what does that love look like?"

Well, like Pat did in her sermon a couple weeks ago, I took my old Barclay commentaries off the shelf … I assumed he would have done the exegetical study on the words in this chapter and was not disappointed when I read what he wrote. He points out that there are 15 characteristics of this Christian love:

(1) Love is Patient … the Greek word always describes patience with people and not patience with circumstances … a person who gets angry slowly … the example given is from right here in Illinois … there was a man named Stanton who had no respect for a man named Abraham Lincoln … he even called Mr. Lincoln a "low cunning clown." Lincoln did not respond to his negativity … as a matter of fact, President Lincoln made Stanton his war minister because "he was the best man for the job. Later, as Mr Stanton looked down upon the recently assassinated President, he said "there lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." Patience prevails.

(2) Love is Kind … it is sweet to all. A bad example of Christianity was Philip the Second of Spain … he was a very religious man … but he founded the Spanish Inquisition and massacred those who thought differently than he did. What he did negated what he said!

(3) Love knows no envy … if it is true that there are two kinds of people in the world (millionaires and those who would like to be), it is probably true that there are two kinds of envy: envy that covets the possessions of other people … and envy that grudges the very fact that others should have what it has not (not so much wanting things as wishing others had not gotten them).

(4) Love is not inflated with its own importance. Barclay reminds us that Napoleon had a problem with this … Napoleon said "I am not a man like other men. The laws of morality do not apply to me." As Barclay concludes, "no one likes the 'important' person. A person 'dressed in a little brief authority' can be a very sight."

(5) Love does not behave gracelessly. Grace and charm come from the same root word … if you and I are living a graceful life … people should find us charming. Being blunt and being brutal are out!

(6) Love does not insist upon is rights … I think in every congregation I have

served there has always been at least one person whom the rest of the congregation will describe as living by the motto: "its my way or the highway." Sometimes they come in families … sometimes they come in teams or committees … sometimes they sit in the pastor's chair, the choir loft, the organ bench, the back pew, the parking lot, the rocking chair in front of the TV, or the Sunday School room.

(7) Love never flies into a temper. It never gives up on people … remember that Kipling said the test of a man is if he could keep his head when everyone else was losing theirs and blaming it on him. A person who can master their own temper can be the master of anything.

(8) Love does not store up the memory of any wrong it has received. One of the greatest gifts this love gives is forgetfulness. We are better off when we can forget those things that others may have done to us.

(9) Love finds no pleasure in evil-doing (perhaps better stated: love finds no pleasure in anything that is wrong). Why is it that we so often can weep with others in their misfortune (like Haiti) than rejoice with others in their good fortune?

(10) Love rejoices with the truth … which means everything on the table … total transparency … whatever the truth is, we want to hear it … it means "being brave enough to face the truth." Right now this congregation needs to deal with the truth of the situation …we need to be brave enough to realize that pretending we aren't in the midst of a crisis won't help the crisis … and partly because

(11) Love can endure anything. We always told our children that they could never do anything that would make us quit loving them. That doesn't mean that everything they would do would make us happy … and sometimes what they did made us feel very bad particularly because of what it was doing to them or for them … but our love for one another was never challenged.

(12) Love is completely trusting. Oh, what a great miracle that would be in today's world. Think of all the mistrust that is purposefully being stirred up by the politicians in the current primary election. Think of all the mistrust being stirred up in the Halls of Congress … in the State of Illinois … and unfortunately, in and through congregations throughout the Church including our own. We all need to be forced to watch the movie INVICTUS and then have small group discussions about what it means for our circles of friendship.

(13) Love never ceases to hope. Within the Christian community nothing is

ever hopeless. Not even death is hopeless. We know that sometimes in order for something or someone to live, they must first of all die. You and I must and will die … and then comes Resurrection. We might call it resurrection … we might call it "being reinvented" … the image might be the cocoon that has ingested the caterpillar from which emerges the beautiful butterfly … if I knew that some of the movies on the silver screen were accurate in their description of an end time … and if I were the last person alive on earth … I would still live in hope.

(14) Love bears everything with triumphant fortitude … not because of who we are but because of who God is … not because of what we can do but because of what God can do. In the beginning: God. In the ending: God. In between: God. And with God … the ending becomes a new beginning.

(15) Love is absolutely permanent, absolutely complete, and absolutely supreme.

And what Paul is saying to the Church in Corinth is … when the world looks at you, this is what it should see.

Yes, Lutheran Church of the Master … when the world looks at us … this is what they should see. Do they? If not … we've got some work to do!