



GENERAL ASSEMBLY
YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES
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Sermon by Rev Dániel Halász
Sunday Worship at the Reformed Congregation in
Maradék

Lection:

1 Cor. 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 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. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, 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. 8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Scriptural text:

Rom. 13:8-10 (Based on the daily passage from the Hungarian Reformed Bible Reading Guide)

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet,"[a] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [b] 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

Sermon:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let me begin my sermon by bringing up a personal story. When I met my wife, who is from Hungary, where I was studying theology, I asked her whether she could imagine living outside the borders of Hungary. She replied that if she loved somebody, she could imagine her life anywhere. If we – human beings – are able to love each other, it is all the more that our Heavenly Father is able to love us. After all, it is God who has the power to put love in our hearts.

Love is mentioned in the Bible several times, which is not surprising as this is the feeling that all humans desire. That is the way we have been created. At the same time, it is also true that because of our sins, we are not able to love everything and everyone unconditionally.

Love can be expressed in a variety of ways. Some people are simply more attentive to the needs of those important to them. Others buy gifts for those they love. Those buying gifts might do so in the hope of making the other person love them more. But we have seen many times that we buy various gifts in order to make up for the love we have failed to provide to our children or others.

In the biblical passage quoted previously, Paul the Apostle talks about the second stone tablet regarding the relationship between human beings. Here, strangely enough, this seems more important than the love towards God. Granted, if someone is unable to love their fellow human beings, how could they love the Lord?

Therefore, what I would like to talk about today is: What does truly selfless neighbourly love mean?

1. At the beginning of the passage we read: “Let no debt remain outstanding...”

No debts? In this day and age debts – owing money – are a natural part of life as our consumer society offers us a variety of loans, and these are used by many. The Scripture, however, is not referring to debts of this kind. There are many people who have more than enough money and they still owe somebody something. I myself owe love to somebody. It is never too late to start repaying love, but this is a debt that can never be fully paid off.

I have seen families where the parents work a lot and have very little time for their children. They are trying to make up for the lack of affection by buying gifts,

even taking out loans to be able to buy certain commodities. Then they work even more to be able to repay the loan, and thus enter a vicious cycle. They are always indebted to somebody.

The situation is somewhat similar when it comes to love: we are always indebted to somebody. After all, the faithful receive love from God, and they pass it on to others. Therefore, this debt can never be repaid. There is no point when a person has loved enough. This is a never-ending outstanding debt.

2. It is for this reason that Paul says: he who loves his neighbour fulfils the law. The choice of words is interesting; the law is not completed, suggesting it is over, but rather it is fulfilled, which suggests complementation.

The ultimate point of the law is love, rather than the rigid following of the commandments. Some might say that this is very simple, but we can also feel that it is also complicated at the same time, as it is not that easy to love others. Especially those who do not love us. And yet, Jesus says: "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Lk 6:27-28 NIV).

Later on he continues this way: "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them" (Lk 6:32 NIV).

Countless times have I heard people say in today's world that they have been offended. Someone did this and that to me and offended me so badly that I will never ever forgive them. To quote Jonah: "I'm so angry I wish I were dead" (Jon 4:9 NIV) or "I do well to be angry, even unto death" (Jon 4:9 KJV). Was this really what Jesus Christ called us to do? The Scripture says: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Rom 12:18 NIV). We should do the best we can as far as we are concerned, as we are obviously not responsible for the behaviour of others.

Therefore, the law gives a negative impression to many because it is full of prohibitions. You shall not do this, you shall not do that. Love, however, is not like that at all. And the law is a form of guidance.

This is perhaps similar to the mutual dependence of order and freedom in society. If only one of them is realized, it leads to trouble. When there is order but no freedom, we are talking about a dictatorship. On the other hand, when there is only freedom but no order, the result is chaos. Therefore, the two are inseparable.

We must examine the law in light of the eternal commandment of love.

3. In what ways does love fulfil the law when we read: you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not covet?

All this is based on the fact that we must not wish any harm to those we love. I have read somewhere that if a person takes issue with these commandments, we should ask them: Can you wish someone to murder? Can you wish someone to commit adultery? Can you wish someone to steal? If you answer 'yes' to these questions, then other people will suffer harm as a result.

It is for this reason that James says: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (Jm 2:10 NIV).

Love is the binding force holding together the whole law. While it is true that in the Old Testament the word 'neighbour' used to refer only to relatives and one's own people, the New Testament has broadened the meaning to include not only family members, friends and acquaintances but all persons we encounter in our life, even if we only meet them once.

This is what Jesus Christ has taught us. However, by no means does this mean that we should tolerate everything. After all, when God was being reviled, Jesus himself got angry. But we must keep in mind that Christ was filled with zeal because he felt sorry for those who had not stepped on the road to salvation. We must be characterised by the same Christ-like zeal in all our endeavours.

So whatever circumstances may surround us, be it politics, aggression, war, poverty and deprivation, trials and tribulations, physical or mental illness, this is what we can preserve, even when nobody else follows this practice.

If people's lives were dominated by this Christ-like love, they would understand why Jesus Christ had come to us.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16 NIV).

So the point is, we should love others the way God loves us. And this love is unconditional, with the help of which we seek the benefit of our neighbour. And every human being is our neighbour. Therefore, let me conclude by suggesting that when we leave today, let us re-read at home Chapter 13 of John's First Letter to the Corinthians, to see what selfless love is like. In doing so, we ourselves are fulfilling God's law, which Jesus Christ has already fulfilled before us. Amen.