

## **Love Never Fails**

The Anglican Church of Freiburg - Sunday the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 2022 - Fourth in Advent  
Homily

Are You God? I know of a German elderly person who had an Asian sponsor child. On the graduation day it was the desire of the German to visit the child whom she supported for ten years. The child was excited too. But a week before the travel the child got a letter which said- I have decided to keep apart the amount for my travel for your higher studies. The girl with tears in her eyes said- if God is love this is Love. The painting that she sent back to Dusseldorf was a question- Are you God? In my lowliness you came handholding, through my turbulence you stayed beside and now in your selflessness you show me the way.

Is Love Just an emotion between two people. I recently watched a young people's film. Two youngsters fell for each other, the story begins thus. However a small misunderstanding between them escalates and they are not able to patch up during their time in the university and part ways as good friends. Memories of the other continue to stay with them. One day the boy decides to get on with life. He invited his old friend for the wedding and on the previous day of the wedding she asks him- If I had forgiven you the day after we had the fight in college would our lives have been different. Time still went by and finally the girl decides to get on with life but early morning on the wedding day she goes with her old friend to the seaside and asks him a question again- If I had forgiven you the day after we had the fight in college would our lives have been different.

Would, If and But cannot define our stories but today when we reflect on LOVE it is in continuation to our Epiphany Reflections. God is made manifest around us in LOVE for God is Love.

Mother Teresa once said that the greatest hunger that several people in the world face today is the hunger for love. Genuine friendships are a casualty in the consumeristic mindset of the modern world. Is there Love Left in This World? We cannot overlook this question for long while we acknowledge real and genuine love that continues to be celebrated among and around us.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 is often read at wedding ceremonies. I would want to draw your attention to four aspects of Love from this text for our meditation this morning

1. What Love Is.
2. What Love is Not.
3. What Love Does Not Do
4. What Love Does

The English language uses the word love with all-encompassing meanings. Greek on the other hand has different words- agape (selfless love) , storge (familial love) , felia (affectionate love), eros (passionate love), ludus (amorous love) , Philautia (self-centric love) , Pragma (sustaining love), Mania (obsessive love). My language Malayalam uses sneham, premam, istam, kamam, vathsalyam, anuragam. You would know what words are used in German for different shades of

meaning of the word Love. The Word Used Here is Agape. Self-Less Love, Love that offers everything unconditionally, the Despite and In spite of Love.

### 1. **What Love Is.**

Paul uses two words here. Love is Patient. Love is Kind.

What do we mean when we say love is patient? Genuine love does not easily give up or lose heart. Misfortunes and troubles do come our way. But genuine love endures them. It is being patient in bearing the offences caused by others and the injury that others create- be it for the body, mind or soul. It is the slowness to thoughts of avenging or getting angry.

It is the wisdom to wait for turbulent waters to settle.

The Teacher and the Disciples were walking by the forest and the Disciples were genuinely thirsty. They asked the Guru for advice regards finding and fetching water. The Teacher showed them the way to a brook. When the disciples reached there it was all muddy water. They were upset. Rushed back to the Teacher and said- the water is muddy. The teacher smiled and told them to go one more time. With half minds they did go only to find the water clear as crystal. On hindsight they realised that the previous time they came some animal would have troubled the waters. They saw the mud and rushed back. The lesson they learned was simple. We should have patiently waited. The mud would have settled and water would have become clear to drink.

The Second word translated as Kind is used only once in the New Testament and literally means to show oneself useful or helpful. Kindness is the act of benevolence when the other needs that touch the most in their lives. Love sees the need of the other not necessarily because the other voices it forth. Love does not walk by seeing the other in need. Love stops by and Love reaches Out.

Formulating our plan for the children's church I was telling our friends that the greatest lesson that we should teach our children is to love and to love means to be kind to everyone. Young people should learn the art of kindness so that their lives become meaningful. The greatest investment we can make with the resources God has blessed us with is by investing it on the lives of others with benevolent kindness.

Love Cannot But Be Kind.

### 2. **What Love is Not.**

We have six words to look at.

The first one is envious. It is the boiling with anger and indictment at the well-being of the other. Envy is our unhappiness at the happiness of the other. When we say love is not envious it means love is the well spring that ensures happiness and well-being of all. Envy or jealousy has great potential to destroy- not the lives of the others but the lives of the envious. When you count the other people's blessing and be sad about it you fail to count your blessings and be glad about it.

The second word is boastful. It is Excessive embellishing of the self or self-display. When I think I am more important than the other- perhaps because of Patriarchal mindsets or social constructs and when I demean the dignity of the other- it proves that there is no love left. Love never boasts and wherever there is boasting there is no love. Boasting never attracts good friends. People love you for who you are and not what you brag about yourself. In the song of the nature lover Michael Johnson wrote- If roses could

talk they would not boast of their beauty, because they know they have always been beautiful.

The third word is arrogant- puffed up, blown up, proud. We have been hearing very sad stories of domestic violence of late. These need not always be physical but can be mental torture. This behavioural aberration stems forth from arrogance. Bernad Shaw says- he who knows nothing but thinks he knows everything is the most puffed up one.

The fourth word is being rude- It is all about unseemingly behaviour. Rudeness can be manifest in words, actions and sometimes inaction. When you think what is offered in love is your entitlement and not grace you even forget basic etiquettes like saying thank you or offering a word of apology when wrong. Rudeness is forgetting to appreciate. It is the missing of basic courtesies of life. Too many gentlemen around and not much of gentleness seen is the tragedy of our times. The rude always make others who come in company uncomfortable. Love has no place when rudeness creeps and intrudes.

The fifth word is easily irritable, provoked. Where there is genuine love, nothing would easily irritate or provoke one to unacceptable behaviour. Irritability is a state of mind. It need not have much provocation. You burst out. You behave badly. You hurt others with words and gestures.

The sixth word is resentful. Being resentful is being cold to the other. There is no genuine reaching out in acknowledgement or appreciation and love finds itself like a seed struggling to grow without water or nourishment. Anger and resentment does not affect the other as it affects you. The test of character is the ability to deal with criticism without resentment. Resentment keeps the fire of hatred alive and blocks genuine reconciliation and celebration of love.

### 3. **What Love Does Not Do.**

Paul writes to us two things.

First is that Love does not insist on own ways. One of the secrets of happy relationship is this- You First. When the “I”, My and My Ways become More Important than the You and Your well-being there love loses its space. When self interest takes priority over the interest of others conflict is bound to escalate.

A happy elderly couple celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary. A young boy asked them what the secret of their joy was. The couple said- stay with us for the weekend and find out. He decided to. Early next morning he heard the door of the couple opening as they were walking into the kitchen. The elderly man opened the door and told his wife- You First. The Wife with a Smile responded- No You First. They smiled and hand in hand they came out of the door together. The young man said. I have found out the mantra of success and that is You First.

The second is Love does not rejoice in wrong doings. The pleasure that some people get in inflicting pain on others could be a case in point. It is not just doing wrong to the other but the very fact that you enjoy doing wrong things that the other does not appreciate is the core issue. We are living in a post truth age. We live in a context where children say we do not believe in God and therefore why bother about consequences of our actions. With or without God we do not have the right to infringe on the happiness of another person. Wrong is wrongdoing and fear of punishment should not be the main deterrent. Love should deter you from doing wrong.

#### 4. **What love Does.**

Paul tells us five things.

One, Love Rejoices in Truth. Love and Truth exist hand in hand. Where there is room given for untruth to enter it is like giving head space for the camel in the tent. Untruth and Love cannot co-exist. One fades away when the other shines forth.

Two, Love bears all things- The original word used *stegei* is about decking, thatching or covering. To protect something with a covering is an image we would understand. Genuine love covers over with silence. It is not the errors and faults are not there, but it is that they do not become points of contention. People learn to celebrate each others short comings. They do not hold behavioural aberrations against the other. They understand that each person is unique and different. The Psalmist in Psalm 32:1 says blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven. This can happens when sins are covered.

Three, Love Believes All Things. There is no room for mistrust or doubt in genuine love. They take everything with confidence and assurance of fidelity. It is all about trust in the other. During my first year in Seminary we were all excited about the first language tests we were to take. Greek and Hebrew were truly Greek and Hebrew for us the freshers. We went to the exam hall. There was a cover on the table but no teacher. No invigilator. Someone went to the Principal. He said- the question paper is on the table. The person asked how about supervision. He said there would be none. The reasoning was this- if we cannot trust you with a question paper- how would we trust you with the church. Love believes all things.

Four, Love Hopes All things. Hope is a powerful gift. It is the ability to wait joyfully confident that the ultimate outcome would be good despite the bad patches experienced. Hope has a strong therapeutic strength in it that it heals any brokenness. Hope is the passion that makes the impossible possible. Emily Dickinson once wrote- Hope is the thing with feathers That perches in the soul And sings the tune without the words And never stops at all. Storms only make people stronger who knows it cannot last for long.

Five, Love Endures all things. When misfortunes befall Love helps to bear them bravely and calmly. It was at the death of his dearest beloved that the painter brushed the painting- the first day in heaven. Gone for ever but the hope of meeting again was strength to face the gruesomeness of the empty nest. Love Endures All Things.

Paul goes on to say- Love never fails and affirms that what remains ultimately is faith, love and hope and the greatest of these is LOVE. When we teach students prepositions, we ask the question what propositions go with fall. For instance Love does not fall out. Love does not fall down from (though we use the phrase falling in love) and Love does not fall off. Love never ends. There is an eternal element of love.

Shakespeare said- Let me not for the marriage of true minds admit impediments. Love is not love which alters when its alteration finds. Or bends with the remover to remove. O no it is an ever fixed mark that looks on tempests and is not shaken. It is the star to every wandering bark whose worth's unknown.

Love Never Fails, Vinod Victor, January 30, 2022