**Sermon 5/5/19**

**1st Corinthians 13:1-13**

According to a Mexican legend, San Ysidro was plowing his garden one morning.

Suddenly an angel appeared and announced:

"The Lord wants to see you, Ysidro. Come with me."

But Ysidro was busy. So he refused the command.

Again the angel appeared and announced: "Unless you come at once,

the Lord will send drying winds, and drought to wither your corn."

Ysidro was unperturbed. He had fought the winds before.

And drought could be relieved by water from the river.

The Angel appeared once more, and said quietly, but very firmly:

"If you do not come with me, the Lord will send you a bad neighbor."

Ysidro paused in the middle of the row he was hoeing, and turned to the

messenger.

"I will go with you now," he said humbly. "I can stand anything but a bad

neighbor."

It is not so difficult to love the whole world.

Our great difficulty is loving the neighbor next door,

the stranger walking down the street, the person we do not know.

God has commanded us to love our neighbor.

But sometimes it is not easy. Often it is very difficult. Frequently it seems

impossible.

Yet it is a choice we make.

We can choose to be upset, offended, angry, envious, arrogant,

boastful, rude, resentful, or self-seeking.

And we can choose not to be.

Everything we do matters.

And everything we don't do matters just as much, sometimes even more.

The church Paul established in Corinth had drifted away from his teaching.

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians tries to bring them back to true faith.

But it is not an easy job.

The congregation has been quarreling among themselves.

There have been lawsuits and sexual immorality within the church.

They argued about differing views of worship,

and who has the most important spiritual gifts.

For twelve chapters, he has wrestled to untie the knots of disunity.

Finally, in chapter 13, Paul wrote the memorable words about the gift of God's

Love.

This is the type of love Paul prescribes for the church in Corinth, and for us.

If only the congregation could grasp the extent, and importance of God's great love

for them, they could learn to love one another,

and change how they live, and how they treat others.

But loving people isn't always easy.

The vow-beakers, truth benders, cheaters, and enemies.

The money-grabbers and back-stabbers we meet, and work with.

How do you love someone who is hard to love?

Our typical strategy is to try harder.

Conventional wisdom says that a lack of love implies a lack of effort,

so we dig in deeper, work harder.

We are going to love if it kills us.

And sometimes it feels as if it will.

Are you low on love?

Down to your last dose of forgiveness?

Scraping the bottom of the barrel of patience?

You may be trying to give what you never received.

The first step of love is not toward them, but toward God.

After all, we can't give what we don't have.

The secret to loving is living loved, living within God's love, surrounded by his

love.

We love because he first loved us.

God showed his great love for us by sending Jesus to die for us

while we were still sinners.

We are commanded to love others, which means everyone,

with that same kind of love.

The first step to loving others is to recognize, and accept, God's love for us.

We are to be reflections of His love in this world.

We are to love other one another so completely that people will say,

 "Look how they love one another. I want to love like that."

The life of faith is about experiencing God's loving presence, now, today.

Living in God's Love, we are able to love others.

Loving God with all our heart and mind and soul,

and loving others as we love ourselves.

Low on Love?

Finding it hard to love?

Someone in your world is hard to forgive?

Is patience an endangered species?

Kindness a forgotten virtue?

If so, you may have forgotten a step – an essential first step.

Living loved.

God loves you. Personally. Powerfully. Passionately.

Others have promised and failed.

But God has promised and succeeded.

He loves you with an unfailing love.

And his love – if you let it – can fill you, and leave you with a love worth giving.

We can't give what we've never received.

If we have never accepted God's love, how can we love others?

The first step of love toward our neighbor is not toward them, but toward him.

We love because he first loved us.

The loneliest place in the world is the human heart when love is absent.

In Stockholm, Sweden, a woman was injured as she rushed to catch a streetcar.

She stumbled in front of the moving car and was caught beneath it.

The police sent for a crane to lift the car off her body.

While waiting for the crane, a crowd of people gathered out of curiosity.

The woman under the car was alternately crying and screaming, and begging for

help.

One man pushed through the crowd.

Ignoring the dirt and grease, and blood, he crawled beneath the car as far as

he could, until he was as close to the woman as he could get.

Then he reached out his hand and said to her, "Take my hand. I will stay with you." As she took his hand, she felt warmth and courage.

Holding tightly to the stranger's hand calmed her,

and prevented her from going into shock.

The screaming and crying and panic ceased, as she held on to a stranger who cared.

After the crane arrived and the woman was released, she said,

"I never thought an outstretched hand could mean so much."

That is what loving others is all about:

 simply reaching out to another, when they need a hand to hold;

 an encouraging word, when they have reach the end of the rope;

 listening with patience, when they need to unburden their problems;

 forgiveness, when they have made a bad mistake;

 the gift of your presence, when they feel all alone.

Jesus commanded us to love one another, as He has loved us.

But we cannot love like that without God's help.

A man asked him: "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,

and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.

There is no commandment greater than these."

What would happen if Christians throughout the world,

reflected God's love each day?

Only God knows.

AMEN