

Youth Sunday
Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit
Cumming, GA
4th Sunday after the Epiphany
1/31/2016
1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Preachers: Will Murray and Laura Schlecht

Radical and Crazy Love
Homily by Will Murray

When I was 15 years old, several of my friends began going on mission trips through their church to countries like the Philippines, Jamaica, Costa Rica, and Mexico. At that moment in my life, I wasn't exactly sure what a mission trip was or why someone would ever pay thousands of dollars to go somewhere where people are less fortunate than we are here.

I began realizing how important these trips were as I began to see the excitement in my friends. Some of them would immediately start putting their entire paycheck towards paying for their trip. They would count down the days until they would get to go with their teams.

It wasn't until they returned that I realized how life-changing a mission trip could actually be. I was starting to understand that my friends were paying money to spend a part of their summer in a foreign country to go and serve others, rather than be served themselves.

A year and a half ago, my best friend, Madi, volunteered at a hospital in Jamaica with her family. Before this trip she was always unsure of where she stood in her faith and what type of person she wanted to be. Madi would be constantly trying to balance worldly things and her devotion to Christ at the same time, rather than letting it mesh together.

But when Madi came back from her trip, I immediately noticed that she was not a normal teenager anymore. While in Jamaica, she found out where God belonged in her life, and she learned how to give him the full control that He needed to have. She smiles more, she's more thankful for what she has, and she focuses on truly getting to know someone before jumping to conclusions about their character. I could make an entire list of things that changed about her from the week she spent in Jamaica, but the main thing that I'm still surprised by is her ability to love other people.

She pushes herself to immediately put others before herself and always makes others feel like they're truly worth something. I'm a strong believer that the true way to experience Christ is by loving and serving other people. I think that a lot of people in this world think that love is something only shared between two people, that love is exclusive or maybe it's temporary. But what's never really understood is that real, unconditional and abundant love has no limits. And that's the type of love that God calls us to show everyone each day. In the lesson today, we hear Paul talk about how without love, all of his gifts and powers would be meaningless.

During the time that this letter was originally written, 1st Corinthians almost centers itself around Paul's faith as a positive model to follow. Paul has a lot of gifts and powers that no one else has. But in the lesson today he's exemplifying someone who, though extremely gifted, if lacking love,

is worthless or nothing. God is love and created us to love. Without love these are just words that have no meaning and we would all be people with no purpose. To me, love is God's way of making himself known. God made love universal so that we can show it to anyone, and in that same way show God to anyone. Love is something that is immediately understood by all people: there is no language barrier. When I go to Honduras, I want to experience radical and crazy love. I want to have my faith stretched, then pushed to love and love more. I hope that my faith grows tremendously and that my heart is truly affected from the relationships that I build and by the people I meet there.

Love is Patient, Love is Kind
Homily by Laura Schlecht

Love is patient, love is kind. While this verse is often used in weddings, it has a much broader meaning than romantic love or the love that we show to our family and friends. What this passage is really talking about is agape love. Agape is the greek word for the unconditional, undying love that God has for us, as His children. It is something that our tiny minds will never be able to comprehend to its full extent.

But, while we are here on earth, it is important to be able to open ourselves to the blessing of agape love everywhere: how God loves us, and how God wants us to love others, even when it is hard. There are countless ways to show love, some of course, not even tangible. One of the major things you can do to embrace God's love is seeing the light in others, which means always finding the good in people, always showing kindness, and always being open to new ideas.

We often forget that God wants us to love each other as ourselves, which is hard when often times we don't really know how to love ourselves either. Sometimes, that involves getting out of our comfort zones and doing things we wouldn't usually do...I think that most of us can agree that this church community is especially overflowing with God's love and light, and it's honestly a beautiful and amazing thing to see people come together not only when things to be celebrated happen, but also through tragedy too.

But, how can we find love outside of the church community? How do we carry God's love everywhere that we go? I think it's safe to say that sometimes, whether it is the injustice we see on the news, materialism, or even our own personal doubts . . . There are times when life can be very overwhelming, even interfering with how we view our faith and the way we view others as brothers and sisters in Christ.

But as Christians, it is our responsibility to acknowledge those things on the news, and not lose hope, and instead use it as a driving force to do even more good in the world by showing one another what it truly means to spread agape love. There are countless ways to get involved locally and through the diocese. I encourage all of you to get out and serve others at least once this year. It can be getting involved with an organization or even finding a ministry that speaks to you here at church. It can even just be reaching out to someone who is in need of compassion and companionship.

I know that personally, the thing that God has always called me to do, is serve globally. I have known for as long as I can remember, that one day, I would be able to work with the LAMB Institute in Honduras. I can honestly say that it has been a dream of mine since I was eight years old. I actually used to write about it in my diary.

This year, I am so incredibly blessed to be presented with the amazing opportunity to visit Tegucigalpa in the summer of 2016. I will be working on different projects around the Lamb Institute, and I will be getting the chance to meet a lot of very amazing people, people that remain incredibly positive despite not having much. I believe that despite the doubt that I have faced before and the times that I have let what I have seen on T.V. dictate the way that I see faith, that the one thing that I can still do is to spread Gods love is by serving others.

There's a quote by Mother Theresa that I really like and it says "Love is a fruit within season at all times, and within reach of every hand." Paul's letter to the Corinthians states that as human beings, we are nothing without the driving force of love. I encourage you to hear what Paul is saying in this letter, remember that you are loved by God, and reciprocate this agape through everything you do in this life.

Let us pray.

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*