

DISORDERED DESIRES

On February 3, 2013, Seminarian Nelson Grigg preached this sermon at Christ Church.

Epiphany 4 – Cycle C: 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

I want to begin this morning with a story that I have changed slightly from something St. Augustine wrote many years ago. The story is of a group of people who were exiles in a foreign land and could only be happy in their own country. They were very unhappy in exile and longed to put an end to their unhappiness and return to their own country. In order to get back to their country they would need to use many forms of transportation such as planes, ships, and busses. It was a long journey back, and they started to enjoy the pleasures of the journey as the jets they took all had complimentary food, and service, and entertainment systems in the head rest in front of them, and lots of leg room. The ships all had gourmet food, swimming pools, and great entertainment including the Blue Man Group. The busses were all luxury coaches with plush seats and a washroom in the back: no school busses for this group!

They were enjoying the many distractions along the way which, as a consequence, made them unwilling to finish the journey quickly. After a while they lost interest in their own country all together. The End.

Let me decode this parable for you. Let's start with who the people are ... they are you and I. The country that they love and long to get back to is God. They are on a journey to learn more about God and to one day see God. On our long journey we call life, there are many 'things' that we use to get closer to God: the Bible is one. Augustine said there are also many things that are meant to be enjoyed, such as attending church services on Sunday, praying together, helping the poor, and loving one another as Jesus has said we should do. Along the way, we can sometimes get caught up and distracted by all the glitz and glamour and shiny things in our world that turn us away from our country, our God.

Augustine calls these distractions along the way "disordered desires". There are many of these disordered desires that keep us from the path of righteousness and turn us away from God. We need to use the things that we have to better love and serve God, so as not to stray from the piety and devotion to God where we, the 'exiles' sometimes venture. We have to refocus on our country, who for us is our God, our Saviour Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. They are the ultimate things that are to be enjoyed. Remember that we were created by God to love God.

In our world today, we desire many things such as: plentiful and nutritious food, a spacious home, a fulfilling job, quality education for our children, a restful vacation, and many other desires that we can afford in our society today. I am not saying that these things are bad and we are to deny ourselves what we need and can afford. What I am saying is that in all of these desires, we need to keep God at the top of the list. I am also suggesting that right below our love for God, his Son, and the Holy Spirit, we need to desire the love for one another as Jesus instructs us is the second greatest commandment.

1 Corinthians 13 tells us all about what love is and what it isn't. Love is: patient, kind, rejoices with the truth, always hopes, always perseveres, and never fails. What love does not do is envy, boast; be proud, rude, self-seeking, quick to anger; keep a record of wrongs, and delight in evil. Think of adhering to these items as your daily "to do" list. When you get up and go out into the world where there are believers and non-believers, you have to be the one to show Christian love as revealed in Jesus. Be patient, whatever happens, and when 'whatever' happens be not easily angered. If all else fails, turn the other cheek and walk away.

1 Corinthians 13 also says that faith, hope, and love are what we need in our lives. What fills us with joy, happiness, and love is our faith.

Our faith in our loving and merciful God.

Our faith in Jesus Christ who showed us sacrificial love as He died on the cross for us.

Our faith in the Holy Spirit that calls us in our baptism to be one with Christ and with the whole people of God.

The verse ends with the acknowledgement that the greatest of these is love. We, as Christians have been given this gift of love by God through his Son Jesus Christ. This gift of love fills us like the Holy

Spirit fills us. This gift of love is embedded in every fibre and molecule of our corporal bodies because of our faith in God, because of our hope of salvation in Christ Jesus, and because of our love for our neighbour, the love Jesus taught and embodied.

One of the greatest gifts and most fulfilling desires I receive occurs when I feel God's love and your love as I enter this house of God at Christ Lutheran. The love I feel when we sing together, hear the Word of God together, break bread and drink wine at God's table together, and hear the Gospel of our Lord preached together in this place of worship, always with love.

In Matthew 22 verse 37, Jesus says that "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." We must remember that everything we do, everything we have, and everything we are is because of God and is for God. Don't let your disordered desires keep you from the greatest commandment our Saviour Jesus Christ has given us.