

### “Love Never Fails”

Dear confirmands, “Nothing lasts forever.” At least that’s how the saying goes. And I suppose that there are times that a saying like that is comforting, because there are times that things seem to last forever. Like the times when Pastor Kassulke asks you a question in class and you just don’t know the answer. And he waits and waits for you to think about it. You know, in reality, I probably didn’t wait much more than several seconds, but I could tell by the way you reacted that sometimes it felt much longer.

Of course, there are other times when just the opposite happens. Time doesn’t seem to take longer, it seems to fly by. I’m guessing that there are many among the adults seated behind you who feel that way today. They’d probably tell you that it seems like just yesterday that you were a small child, but now it is very clear that you have grown up. Even I look back and think wasn’t it just a few months ago that you started the your very first confirmation class. Of course, it was really over two years ago.

No matter what time feels like for us, we’d have to admit that the statement, “Nothing lasts forever” really isn’t true. Most things don’t last forever. Most things either fly by quickly or at some point are ended mercifully. But some things do last forever. And when I say forever, I mean forever. These things are the most important things. Your confirmation is about these things, things that last forever. Things that last forever are things that God has shown you, has revealed to you, in his Word. Our sermon text tells us of three things that in a very special way last forever: faith, hope and love. And it encourages us to focus on one in particular: love. Please listen as I read the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> 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 have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. <sup>11</sup> 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 childish ways behind me. <sup>12</sup> Now we see but a poor 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.

<sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

The words that I just read are commonly read at weddings. Maybe you’ve been to a wedding that included them. But these words definitely speak about more than the love between a husband and a wife. They speak about love in general and how important it is for us as Christians. So if we’re really going to take them to heart, the first thing that they have to tell us is what love is. And these verses tell us that love is more than we usually think.

TV and movies, and even the way most people talk tell us that love is a feeling. It’s an emotion. But love is much more than that. Love is being so concerned about someone else that you act in ways that serve their best interest. Love focuses not on what can I get out of it, but on what I can do for someone else. That’s the way God describes it in 1 Corinthians 13. Love is patient, kind, caring. Love is honest and good. It is humble and respectful. Love leads us to treat other people in the same way that we would like to be treated. And it does so consistently and persistently. Love never fails.

So, does this description sound like you? Do you never fail in showing love to others? Oh, certainly you have your moments, but one of the most important things that we learn from this chapter is that we don't love the way that God wants us to love. How many times have you been impatient or unkind? How many times have you held a grudge or joined in with the evil actions of others? To perfectly love others as described here is not easy. It is impossible. We've failed. You've failed.

But your Jesus succeeded. Jesus was always patient. He was always kind. He was never self-seeking or boastful or rude. He never held a grudge or rejoiced in evil. And he loved you so much that he sacrificed himself for you. He loved you so much that he became a true human being, just like you, but without your sin. And then he took your sin. He carried it to the cross. He died to take away that sin, and he rose to life again to prove that it was really gone. And so when we read and when we believe that love never fails, we're reading about and talking about true love. This is love in its truest sense. It never fails because it never stops focusing on others. And we find this sort of true love only in Jesus.

But you are here today and you are sitting in the front pew this morning because Jesus has called you to that love. Having died for you, having risen from the dead, having ascended into heaven, he sent his Holy Spirit into your hearts. He transformed your sinful, dark, selfish heart into hearts of love. And through faith he calls you to reflect love to others. And the confession that you make today in front of the congregation means that you intend to do. You are confessing that with God's help you intend to live a life of love that is empowered by and modeled after Christ's love for you.

And it is that sort of love that sets your life apart. It gives meaning to them. It turns your words and actions into something more than the clanging sound of a cymbal being struck. And it is the love of God poured out to you and reflected in your life that will last into eternity, when God who is love will keep you in his glorious presence forever.

That is something to look forward to. That is something to set your hearts on. That is something worth pursuing. Everything else will pass away: our knowledge, our spiritual gifts, even the preaching and teaching of God's Word, which won't be necessary in heaven. But we're not there yet. Paul compares his journey from life in this world to the glories of heaven to his maturing from a child into an adult. What a lovely comparison for us to use on your confirmation Sunday. In so many ways you are making the transition from childhood into adulthood. Many aspects of this maturing have already taken place, and many more will unfold in the near future. But in a spiritual sense, you will always remain a child. You will always need the Word and the teaching of your heavenly Father. Sure, you will continue to grow, even as the Bible says, away from simple teachings that could be compared to milk for babies. You will continue to grow into the solid food of digging into the deeper truths of Scripture, and you've laid a good foundation for that already. But until you reach heaven you will need the strengthening and equipping offered in God's Word and in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Paul compares his own knowledge, and that of all Christians in this world to looking into a dark and foggy mirror, the kind of mirror, made of metal, that the common people of his day would have been using. You can see and know some things. God has enabled you to believe what he has revealed to you, but only in heaven will you see and know fully, the way that God sees you and knows you fully.

Confirmation is not something that God demands or that he designed. It's not a sacrament like baptism or like Holy Communion, where God gives you a gift of his grace. But that doesn't mean that it is unimportant. This is a big step in your life of faith. I am proud of you for being here, and I am thankful to God that he has blessed you in this way. But confirmation is not about today. It is not the end of your journey. Confirmation is a reminder that your journey still has a way to go. And it is a reminder that God is with you on that journey. Jesus is with you today and always with his perfect love. And his love never fails.