

“Love that builds up”

January 29, 2012

Text: Psalm 111, 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

I.

This reading from 1 Corinthians 8 about *food offered to idols* is a complicated reading. The whole notion or idea of such a thing is so totally foreign to us. I mean, *food offered to idols* ... what’s that?

As usual, context is everything. In the first century world of the Corinthian Church, there were many pagan cults.

1. At these cultic festivals, it was very common that food—often times, meat—would be offered to the respective idols in an effort to appease them or win some favor from them.
2. It was common practice that, later, the left over meat from these events would be sold in the market place.
3. This meat, in turn, would be eaten in private homes or at other festival celebrations. Now, for most of the church members, this was not a problem ... because they had never been in a pagan cult. In fact, many of these folks—who are referred to as *the strong* by Paul—many of them claimed a certain *spiritual knowledge* of the Christian faith that set them apart from those who had been in a cult (referred to as *the weak* by Paul).

The problem arose in the Corinthian Church when some of the new Christians who had come into the church from a pagan cult (usually from the lower classes) would be at some festival ... and would see other church members—those claiming deeper knowledge—eat meat that had been previously offered to an idol at some pagan festival.

1. On the one hand, the lower classes could seldom afford to eat meat. Therefore, when the opportunity presented itself, there was a strong temptation.
2. However, on the other hand, as former pagans who had recently converted to Christianity, when they would eat the meat (meat that had been offered to an idol) they would be left with a guilty conscience.
3. They were apparently not sufficiently free psychologically and spiritually from the memory of their pagan past. Often times, this would lead them to falter in their faith, even to the point of dropping out of the church.

This was the situation the Apostle Paul was trying address in this section of 1 Corinthians. His recommended solution (noted in verse 1) is that ***Knowledge***—this

special knowledge that some church members claimed—*puffs up, but love builds up*.

II.

This is the primary point Paul wants to make to the Corinthian Church—again, that *love* is the bottom line. Why? Because *love builds up*.

- Paul reminds us that love is greater than knowledge. Knowledge is the focus of so much of our learning and our education. Knowledge can certainly be a good thing. But it is not greater than love.
- Love is also greater than logic; it is greater than our ability to reason. No matter how skillful and artful we are with words and with our ability to make an argument, all of this is subordinate to love.
- Love is also greater than *who's right and who's wrong?* When we think about all time we invest in trying to exalt ourselves, is it really THAT important? When the sun sets on the day, does it really matter?

What Paul is reminding us is that LOVE is always, again and again, what our Christian faith comes down to. It is always the bottom line.

1. Did we do it with love?
2. Are we acting out of love, love for our family, for the community, love for the Church ... love for our nation and for the planet?

III.

The core teaching from **1 Corinthians 8** is that, while *knowledge puffs up, love builds up*. And Paul is always trying to build up. He's trying to build up the church. Now, as we know from our own experience in the Church, that can be a challenging task.

Why? Because we are a diverse people ... and sometimes we lose sight of who we are and of our purpose as Christians.

Again, *love builds up*. Therefore, whenever we act in ways that do not *build up*, we soil the spirit of Christ. CHECK IT OUT!

The context for this love is the sacrificial love of Christ on the cross. It is this suffering love that defined Jesus' last days. As Christians, Christ's sacrificial love on the cross stands as an invitation to each of us to higher spiritual ground.

This love is the high water mark we aspire towards as Christians. This is who we are called to be as followers of Christ. Doing the *loving* thing, therefore, has social

implications for the community. It *builds up* the community.

IV.

A man once observed a young boy out in a field flying a kite. However, he noticed there was something odd about the way the boy was standing and holding on to the string. When he walked closer to the boy to check it out, he discovered that the boy was blind. Curious about the boy's apparent fascination with kites, he asked him,

Do you like flying kites?

I sure do, the boy responded.

This peaked the man's curiosity even more. *But how do you like flying a kite if you can't see it?*

The boy answered, ***I may not be able to see it, but I can feel it tuggin'***.

Love that *builds up* is like that. We may not be able to see it, but we can *feel it tuggin'*.

There are always forces and motivations we have to contend with in life ... people going their own way ... seeking to do their own thing without much regard for the whole. Christian love always invites us to higher spiritual ground.

1. Love *builds up*, says Paul. It doesn't play ego games ... games of superficial pride ... games of trying to set oneself apart as superior.
2. The *strong* in the Corinthian Church had to take care that their freedom to act was softened by their responsibility to DO the right thing.

Everything we do in life has a consequence. Consequences matter. As Christians, we're called to anticipated consequences with LOVE as our guiding light. For Paul, our freedom as Christians is always subordinate to LOVE.

With this in mind, we're to DO what is best for the community. We're to DO what is best for the body of Christ that is the church. We're not supposed to just *do our own thing*. We're to DO the *right thing* based on the context.

It may not necessarily be the most *popular* thing. In an ideal world, it may not be our *number one option*. It may not be what's going to soothe our ego, boost our pride and reward us with the most trophies. Still, if it's the *loving* thing to do, it's the right thing; because *love builds up*.

V.

In Paul's conception of the Church as *the body of Christ*, freedom is always subordinate to love. Although freedom is important, love, which is more inclusive, is the superior value.

A vivid example of this took place in one of my previous pastorates in Poway, California. When I first arrived at the church, the choir was meeting for rehearsal in the private home of one of the members.

- Although a well-intentioned small gathering of people, they had developed the custom of topping off their fun-filled rehearsals with wine and other mixed drinks to the point where the libations were very much a part of the choir practice experience.
- However, as we thought about it, what subtle message was this sending to an aspiring new choir member who was an alcoholic?

As with *the strong* in the Corinthian Church, the choir members were merely living out their freedom as adults to drink socially. However, this very experience could easily have been a stumbling block for a weaker member to slide back into alcoholism.

With little fanfare, the choir soon moved to the church sanctuary for their rehearsals and both our choir and our church went on to experience considerable growth.

This is a graphic example of what Paul means by doing *the loving thing*, the thing that—from the perspective of the whole—*builds up* the *body of Christ* that is the Church.

Love that builds up ...

VI.

I'm shifting gears, now, to CROP WALK 2012. Today is CROP WALK recruitment Sunday in our church. Certainly, our annual CROP WALK for world hunger is an example of *love that builds up*.

All around the world, every day, there are thousands and thousands of people who are hungry, who do NOT have enough food to eat. *Love that builds up* is love that does Something to help feed these hungry people of the world.

- Our Miami Lakes CROP WALK for 2012 is on Sunday, February 26.
- It starts at NOON right here on our church grounds.
- As usual, there will be a picnic to follow.
- At this early stage, it looks like CROP WALK 2012 is going to be well attended and should very well be a rousing success. We certainly hope so.

1. Our church goal for CROP WALK 2012 is 60 walkers.
2. Again, 25% of the funds earned come back into our community, going to the Family Center at St. Andrews Lutheran Church in Hialeah.

So, after worship, over in Fellowship Hall, we invite you to sign up for our annual CROP WALK. Get your envelope and sign up people to sponsor you. Get as many sponsors as you can. There will be prizes for the top three fund raisers.

No matter your life circumstances, we have a WALK for you.

1. The traditional WALK is three miles.
2. However, we also have a mile walk for those for whom a three mile walk is a bit much.
3. Furthermore, for the handicapped, we have an even shorter walk—around Fellowship Hall. That's it! Whatever your circumstances, we have a walk for you.

For the families of our church, CROP WALK is a super family event. It is a great way to teach and educate our children on the meaning of Jesus' mandate to us to *feed the hungry*.

Feeding the hungry ... reaching out to the needy ... this is all a part of what it means to be the Church and to be a Christian.

CROP WALK, friends, is love in action that *builds up*.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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