

# CELEBRATING AN EXCELLENT CHRISTMAS IN MATURITY

Today we have reached the advent celebration of Love.

It was great to hear the children begin our service with verses about love.

And our text this morning begins with a bold claim.

**Paul boldly claims that love never ends.**

Do you believe that statement?

Is it really true that love never ends?

Do you see evidence of its unfailing existence?

From my perspective of our world love seems to be taking a beating.

**It seems everywhere I look love is dying.**

On wedding days couples stand before their family and make sacred vows.

Their closest friends are there listening and believing.

The groom and bride promise to love and to cherish each other.

And they make these vows before their families, friends, and God.

A minister assists in the expression of those vows.

They speak covenants and vows that are public record.

Love "till death do us part".

50% of those couples who promise unending love to each other end in divorce.

Wouldn't it be more honest to promise to love until your beauty fades?

Or, I promise to love you until I get bored with you?

Or, I promise to love you until I really get to know you, or you hurt me?

A love that "never ends" is promised but half the time it is not delivered.

Something is wrong! Is it love, or, is it those making the vows?

Paul tells us it boils down to an immature approach to life.

Immaturity does not anticipate challenges.

Immaturity does not consider that things change.

**If we think everything will stay the same we can't know unending love.**

**But when we recognize that life is unpredictable love can prevail.**

**1 Paul mentions three things that on the surface seem pretty dependable.**

But these three things end.

**Prophecy, God speaking to our world, is one thing that seems permanent.**

Surely that is something we can always count on.

God has always spoken.

**"Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good," (1 Thessalonians 5:19-20)**

We celebrate the birth of Jesus, the focus of prophecy (1 Peter 1:10-11).

According to John 1:1, Jesus is the Word.

**"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."**

You can't get much more permanent than Jesus.

If you can't count on Jesus, the Word, what can you count on?

Jesus always intercedes for us to the Father.

Surely God's voice of prophecy will never be silenced.

**Paul also mentions tongues or communication which also seems permanent.**

Communication is getting faster all the time.

Communication drives the world these days.

It is instantaneous.

As I preach this sermon it could be streamed live.

It could reach the other side of the globe almost as quickly as you hear it.

Communication isn't getting weaker but is getting more and more intense.

What would happen if all communication ceased?

Could you imagine a world without communication?

And how about a church without prayer?

Paul commands us to pray without ceasing.

**"Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18)**

"Tongues" can be an expression of prayer.

God invites us to converse with Him in prayer.

There is nothing temporary about that.

Knowledge is the third dependable thing Paul mentions.

We have access to more and more knowledge at our finger tips.

Anything you want to know just Google it.

And if Google doesn't have the answer, God certainly does.

**"Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand His decisions and His ways!" (Romans 11:33)**

**"For in Him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—" (1 Corinthians 1:5)**

God enriches our lives with His great knowledge.

That is something we can always count on.

But Paul says something amazing.

Prophecy will pass away - not permanent.

Tongues will cease - not permanent.

Knowledge is imperfect - and the imperfect will pass away.

These things, along with anything else that seems dependable, won't last.

When we realize these things don't last, we know nothing else will either.

Everything will change.

Our spouses will change.

Children will change.

Parents will change.

Families will change.

Work will change.

Traditions will change.

The church will change.

Society will change.

You will change.

When we can embrace change, we experience maturity.

**2. And in that maturity we make another discovery about what REMAINS.**

Maturity in Christ sees that love never ends.

Paul saw the great need of the Corinthian church was maturity.

They should have been spiritually mature.

But they just weren't getting it.

**Paul said, "I could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh. ..." (1 Corinthians 3:1-3a)**

They showed they did not value Jesus' death or each other.

Their love was frail, feeble, and faltering.

Never-ending love was a foreign language to them.

Somehow they had missed the coming of the perfect.

When the perfect comes the imperfect will pass away.

He called them to live in the fellowship of Jesus.

He called them to live in the Spirit.

He reminded them of the Lord's Table in chapter 11.

He taught them about the gifts of the Spirit in chapter 12.

Then he taught them the excellent way of love in chapter 13.

Living in Jesus and His Spirit results in maturity.

Sharing communion was a mark of maturity they should have manifested.  
Serving each other with spiritual gifts was maturity they should have shown.  
Paul said that we have all been there.

We have all had a childish outlook on life.

He admitted that he had been a child once.

He was caught up in childish ways.

I spoke like a child.

I thought like a child.

I reasoned like a child.

But he chose not stay in that place.

He wanted that imperfect view of the world to give way.

When he became a man he put away his childish ways.

He let go of the imperfect, childish, immature ways.

And the reason he let it all go was so he could see what was perfect.

What was this perfection or completion?

Jesus was the perfection that Paul saw!

He exchanged everything in life for Jesus!

Nothing else mattered to Paul except Jesus, because nothing else remained.

Jesus, God's perfect expression of love, was central to Paul.

I want to know Him.

Nothing else matters.

**"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death,"** (Philippians 3:7-10)

That was Paul's personal mission for his life.

And it was his desire that Jesus be first in everyone's life.

**"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better."** (Ephesians 1:17)

Paul knew that nothing else will make you and me mature.

Nothing but Jesus can give us a clear view of life and God.

Everything around us can give us only a glimpse of eternity.

Everything is partial or incomplete.

But Jesus is complete, perfect love.

He is the full representation of the Father.

He is the perfect likeness of God.

**"He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. ... For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." (PREPARE FOR COMMUNION)**

**"God creates out of nothing. Therefore until a man is nothing, God can make nothing out of him."** (Martin Luther)

There is only one way to celebrate an excellent Christmas - in maturity.

And maturity is found only in Jesus.

Maturity, that lets go of everything, so love can be our aim (1 Cor. 14:1)

And when love is our aim God redeems the things that will pass away.

Maturity discovers that everything we try to keep will pass away.

But Jesus is the perfect love that never ends, that has come to us.

Communion affirms that Jesus sustains us through the changes of life.

Only the life that is built on the foundation of Jesus will stand.

If Jesus is not the centre of your life, everything will fail.

But yielding everything to Jesus by faith enables love to conquer all.