

Jeremiah 1:4-10
Psalm 71:1-6
1 Corinthians 13:1-13
Luke 4:21-30

Notes on the Epistle Lesson

This passage, the “Love Chapter” from 1 Corinthians, contains some of the most well-known, and the most beautiful, words in the Bible.

Most people who have studied the New Testament are aware that its original Greek uses two of the three Greek words that are translated into English as “love”. These are *agape* and *phileos*. *Phileos* is love from the heart; it is the love between friends, between husband and wife, between parent and child. It is a love that is not chosen but occurs naturally. Even our language reflects this fact; we “fall in love” with someone.

Agape, on the other hand, is a love that is a choice. One chooses to love; to put the interests and well-being of another ahead of their own. Rather than a love from the heart, it is a love from the mind. In the original Greek of 1 Corinthians, it is this type of love used in every appearance of the word in the thirteenth chapter.

Remember that this passage appears in the midst of Paul’s discussion of Christians’ interdependence with one another. Although this chapter is often used in wedding services – including my own – its true context is for love within the church. Any division between believers is an anathema to Paul and he calls for the Corinthian congregation to heal their divisions in a spirit of selfless, *agape* love. Surely he would call on Christians today to do the same.

Notes on the Gospel Lesson

This week’s Gospel Lesson is the second part of the account of Jesus’ teaching in his hometown synagogue. Remember that in the previous reading, Jesus has read from the scroll of Isaiah and then sat down in the seat of Moses. The passage he read, from Isaiah 61, was a messianic prophecy. He begins this week’s Gospel Lesson by saying that he is the fulfillment of that prophecy.

We often believe that it was this claim which angered the people of Nazareth. Yet Luke tells us that was not the case. On the contrary, “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.” Claiming to be the Messiah did not offend the people. It was Jesus’ next words that they found infuriating.

Of all the prophets of Israel, none were held in higher regard than Elijah. His disciple and successor, Elisha, was held in almost as high esteem. Jesus pointed out that Elijah had miraculously fed a Gentile during a famine and not any of the people of Israel. Likewise, Elisha had healed a Gentile of leprosy while there is no account of the prophet healing an Israelite of

this dreaded disease. It was these words that roused the people to fury. When Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, everyone thought he was wonderful. When he claimed that God loved Gentiles as much as he loved Jews, everyone was “filled with rage”. What message from Jesus do we reject because of our prejudice and bigotry?