



Some tips for living!

Sermon on 2. Sunday of Epiphany

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.^[c] Do not be conceited.

On the Internet, in newspapers and on the streets there are countless Tips and solutions for every problem that exists in the world. To give a few examples: there are solutions on how to lose weight quickly, how to breed pigeons or how to remove chocolate from carpets. All the way to more complex topics, such as how to solve relationship crises. The Apostle Paul also seems to be suggesting such "life hacks" to us today. In the short verses that we have just heard, he gives us 21 pieces of advice that recommend in staccato fashion what we should do. These suggestions from the Apostle Paul are about how we Christians can live better with one another. But in actual fact the Apostle is not giving us an all inclusive list of solutions for all problems. We do not find a sentence above which says: "If you do this, you will solve this or that problem." In this respect, the advice from the Apostle Paul cannot be described as practical advice for all problems. On the contrary, the advice from the Apostle Paul is more like a description of the things that are not good and right. The advice of the Apostle Paul is more like a diagnosis and shows us how far we are from everything that God wants from us. For example: When I hear that I should love my enemy, I actually see that I actually cannot love my enemy; When I hear that I should be happy in hope, I realize that I am not happy in hope, but am often very sad and despondent; When I hear that I should be persistent in prayer, I realize that I pray far too little; When I hear that I should bless the people who persecute me and want to hurt me, I realize how difficult it is to love my enemies too. So what is missing from all of the "life hacks" of the Apostle Paul- What is the secret tip! What is missing is the solution to the problem! How on earth do I manage all of this? How can I, as a Christian, live in my congregation or in the world as the Apostle suggests here?

If we look a little deeper, we notice that his suggestions all have to do with the close network of relationships. So to begin with it might help to clarify one thing. Above all, in modern times, we humans live with an untrue belief that says: The individual is the most important and the most decisive. Hence the emphasis on individual freedom or the right to be able to decide for ourselves. But that statement is on the basis of an untrue belief that we humans are essentially born free. We humans are not free but are always born into a network of relationships that we did not choose ourselves. Everything that we are, we did not decide, but was given to us. Our culture, our language, our upbringing is not the product of our actions or our decisions, but a long network of relationships into which we were born and grew up. That is why it seems important to me to get to the bottom of all of the apostle's suggestions. So, what is the secret tip

that ties everything together? In the first sentences that the apostle Paul gives us here, we find this principle. It is about love, which should be pur. And it is about the evil that must be overcome and it is about the fundamentally good. One thing becomes clear from all of the Apostle Paul's sentences. And that is that our network of relationships are broken and do not automatically produce the kind of things that the Apostle suggests.

Can you command, suggest or train such genuine love? The answer is no. Because the world would be different today if there were such a tip or life hack!" Instead, we know only too well how false love works. False love usually comes from a situation of hurt. I would like to explain this with the following example: A person was seriously disappointed. There was an argument with nasty, hurtful words. And then the bang of the closing door and silence. But at home it was anything but quiet. The hurt and anger are noticeable long after the argument. And the thoughts have a life of their own. They don't let us go. Even if I don't see the person who hurt me anymore, I still feel the anger that I take home with me. After a while, however, I meet up with the very person who annoyed me so much. I would prefer to just ignore this person. But I don't want to embarrass myself that way. That's why I try to approach people in a friendly and loving way with the best smile I can conjure up. But love is forced and not genuine. I am torn within myself. The anger and disappointment that I feel are still there. That is an extremely unpleasant feeling. Fake love is like that! It is unpleasant because it is not genuine, but only a pretense. It is therefore not just a cheap copy of real love. In fact, it is the terrible opposite of love. It pretends to be something that is not there in reality. And where there is no truth, there can be no love. All those who suffer from fake love are therefore destroyed by it sooner or later. When Paul suggests that love should be without falsehood, it becomes clear that this is a completely different network of relationships than we know in our world. Paul states that love needs a new origin and a new source. The origin of love is not, as many people think, to be found in the heart of man. The origin of love can only be found in God. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..." Nowhere else did God show us his love so convincingly as on the day he gave us his son Jesus Christ. On the cross of Golgotha, God simply poured out all his wealth. And gave himself to us. This Jesus is the source of all love. If I want to experience real love, I can only find it in Jesus. In the first chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul states that all love can only come from Jesus. All the good things that people can produce are not real. They are therefore an illusion. The wonderful thing is that God does not keep his love to himself. Through Jesus, God gives us himself and thus he also gives us his love. Yes, the love of God in Jesus Christ did not get stuck on Mount Golgotha. Nor did it disappear with Jesus in the grave! No, God's love in Jesus is in motion. This love was called out of the grave by Jesus. This love also brought the 12 disciples out of hiding and gave them the gift of going into all the world and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. To this day, this love is still spreading in many countries around the world.

It is on the move in prisons where Christians can forgive their torturers. It is on the move where Christians give new hope to the poorest people in the world out of pure love and without repayment. And this love is on the move with us too. If I cannot forgive my brother, or if I feel that I simply cannot keep God's good commandments, that does not mean that I should try harder. No, I should just know where to find real love. A few lines before Paul writes these words, he says: "The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." This is a fact that God has simply established through our baptism. Through our baptism, everything that Jesus did for us on the cross of Golgotha is also powerfully at work in us. And that is precisely the secret behind the 21 instructions that the apostle Paul gives in this section. With 21 instructions, he does not want to prescribe a new code of law for us. Nor does Paul expect anything impossible from us. He doesn't tell us that we should make an effort to finally become real Christians! No, we are already Christians through our baptism. And precisely

because we are already Christians, he knows that Jesus and the Holy Spirit themselves are working in us. It's not about me trying harder to finally reach the goal. It's about me holding on to Jesus and living from his love. We Christians are not the sun itself, we just place ourselves in the light and warmth that God has given us through Jesus. And through this we get to feel something of Jesus that we can then pass on. Of course I notice that Jesus is completely different to me. When I'm angry with someone or when someone has hurt me, that hurt stands between us. I can't just forgive in the blink of an eye. Instead, I want to punish the person who hurt me. So an act of revenge follows every bad deed. Unfortunately, we know this path all too well. Jesus finally broke this chain. His love is fundamentally different. And changes the world by meeting hate with love. In today's Gospel we heard that Jesus used the water intended for Jewish ritual washings to make wine. That was Jesus' first miracle and is a sign of Jesus' entire work. Jesus does not want to help us become even better people. No, Jesus must fundamentally change the wine in the old vessels. He must make something new out of it. Just as Jesus made wine from water, he does the same with us today. And because Jesus does that, I know that his love will never remain without fruit among us either. Amen