

Sermon – May 14, 2023

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Remember that Jesus is talking to his disciples at the table on Thursday night, the last meal he's going to have with them. He's told them about what is going to happen. In the next 24 hours he's going to be arrested, he's going to be tried, he's going to be beaten, he's going to be crucified. He's preparing them for that separation, because he knows he's going to die. But he also gives them a hope and the knowledge that death isn't going to win, because three days later he's going to rise again. But when you know someone is going to leave you sometimes it's hard to hear that next part. All you can think about is the separation that's going to happen. Jesus recognizes that in our human experience, so he tries to help them understand that though he may not be with them anymore they're not going to be alone. In that he also commissions them not to keep to themselves. He gives them the challenge of what to do while he is not there, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” 'You will do what I've asked of you.'

Jesus has just in the chapter before this told them what the commandments are. The greatest commandment is to love God with your mind, with your strength, with your soul, with your body. With all that you are, love the Lord your God, *and* love your neighbor as yourself. Those were the commandments that Jesus gave right before he says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” So, to show that we love God, that we love Jesus, we are called to show love to God and to each other.

Now the first one is easier, right? It's easy to love God, the one who created us, who nurtured us, who gives us life. That part seems a lot easier than the second part, which is to love one another. Not only are we to love one another, we're to love one another *in the way* that Jesus loved the other. Jesus love was a grace-filled, all encompassing, accepting love. Didn't matter what the person had done. Didn't matter where that person stood in society. Didn't matter if he agreed with that person, Jesus still loved. That's the love that Jesus wants us to show. By doing that we show that we love God. I think Jesus also understood, that in our human experience, that's going to be a challenge. So, Jesus promises them that he's not going to leave them alone in trying to do this, to live out this commission. “...And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth...”

Now remember when he says “you” he's not necessarily talking about each individual; he's talking to the community as a whole. We together are receiving an Advocate. An advocate is someone who stands with you, who is called to your side in a time of need. When we hear that Jesus is going to have God send an advocate we think it's somebody that's going to stand with us for God, right? Stand on our behalf to God, help us get into God's good graces. What if it's the opposite? What if the Advocate that is being sent is an advocate for God to us? Bear with me here. Jesus says, “And I will give you another advocate...” which means there's already been an Advocate. We are now going to assume that Jesus is that advocate. So, if Jesus is the Advocate who is he advocating for? He is standing with God advocating for God to humanity, to a world that is struggling to understand the kind of love that God is trying to ask us to give. Jesus has done the ground work, and what Jesus has been called to do, as God's Advocate, to break down the barrier that separates humanity from God, creation from creator. In finalizing his role as an advocate, he knows he is going to have to be separated again. He's going to die, rise from death and ascend to where God is; but he's not going to leave us alone.

Jesus then uses the image of orphans, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.” When we think about orphans we think about those who have no parent, which means they have no one to speak on their behalf. We often think of orphans as little children, right? Those that need to be adopted, to have a parent. To have somebody stand with them and for them, to be their voice in the world. Jesus is saying, 'You don't need that because I'm with you, I am in you, I am your voice. You are not going to be without love. You are not going to be without a parent, because I am going to be with

you. Maybe not in the same way that I have been but I am with you.' Because we believe that Jesus is God incarnate, right? "The word became flesh..." We also believe that the Spirit is a part of God. So, the Spirit is God with us, within us, in a different way; so God is never separated from God's creation.

The church understood that, and the disciples tell the church what we believe about God the Spirit, "For, 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'" We're not orphaned because we are claimed by God as God's children. "Since we are God's offspring..." Since we know that we have been adopted, that we have the Advocate with us, we have that nurturing presence of God with us forever, we're not to think of God as some being that's separate, "...a distant deity like gold or silver, or stone..." an image, an icon, something that we have made. God is with us. God is a part of us; that is what the Advocate is.

"In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live." How do we *see* love? Love is a verb. It's an abstract thing, but we see love in the actions of those who love us, right? We talked about the love of a mother, the one who brings us into the world. Sometimes the woman that brings us into the world isn't really much of a "mother." They give us life, they bring us here, but they may not have the gift to be able to love and nurture. But God still provides women who fulfill that motherly role: comforting children, feeding, sustaining, standing with. Even if they are not related to us by blood, they nurture us, and they love us, and they help us understand what love is.

"On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them." God reveals God's self through love. Through the love of Jesus in giving up his life and conquering death. Through the love of the Spirit which nurtures our understanding of who God is. And through the love of the community as we seek to love. (a baby cries out) Yes, Max, we cry out to God, right? To feel that loving pretense and God is there to give us the comfort. The Spirit helps us continue to grow in our understanding of God and who God is.

So, what a wonderful day to remember that we are loved by God, and that we can love God. The way that we love God is to show God's love to those who are around us, no matter who they are. So, on this day and every day, may we look with love; and may we seek to live the kind of love that God advocates to us through the gift of God's pretense in us in the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, we thank you for the many ways that you show love. We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit within and among us that continues to nurture our understanding with you and of you. Who seeks to help us grow to be the kind of loving people that you would have us be. We ask your blessing upon us as we seek to be the nurturers of love in this world. May we continue to function as an advocate for who you are and how you seek your world to be, for we pray this in and through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen