

John 14:15-21
“Not Left Empty Handed”
Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2020
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Jesus said: ***“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”*** (John 14:15).

A young woman who purchased a book and read a few pages laid it aside as not interesting. But some time later, she became acquainted with the author. Soon, tender friendship sprang up. Then the book was no longer dull. Every sentence had a charm for her heart. Love was the interpreter.

So, why is the Bible – *for many people* – uninteresting and even distasteful to the human heart? Because it knows not the Author.

But when by the Spirit of God the heart learns to know and love Him who gave the Bible and who reveals Himself in the Scriptures, then the pages of this Book become most interesting, and every sentence is interpreted by the Spirit of love.

[If You Love Me...]

This morning’s Gospel lesson is all about love. But, you may have noticed that Jesus speaks a lot about the Law. Does this shock you?

He says: ***“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”*** (John 14:15). Then He says: ***“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me”*** (John 14:21a).

Where is love with the Law?

The world around us says that Jesus hung out with sinners.

The world sees Jesus reclining at the table surrounded by tax collectors and prostitutes partying with sinners. The world sees Jesus watching people sin.

The world never says that Jesus tells us to follow the Commandments! This sounds so Old Testament! Aren't we New Testament people?! Isn't God always loving?

Yes, Jesus was around sinners. After all, He was around people like you and me. But, Jesus wasn't passive just kicking back and saying, "*Sin all the more!*" No! He was calling sinners to repentance!

Again, we hear Jesus saying: "***If you love me, you will keep my commandments***" (John 14:15).

The sinful world may question these words from Jesus. But this is the true Jesus. It all depends on how you are taught about Jesus. Are you taught by the world, or are you taught by His Word?

For us – God fearing people – we are taught by His Word.

By saying "***If you love me...***", Jesus is speaking to us saying that He expects our love. This is agape love, or the love of purpose. The grammar tense here is present. You see, Jesus desires that we love Him constantly.

We show that we love Him by keeping His Commandments by fearing, loving and trusting in Him above all things (The First Commandment). And, as the Apostle Paul writes: "***What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?***" (Romans 6:1-2)

Paul continues saying: "***Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life***" (Romans 6:12-13a).

Now, none of us are perfect at keeping the Law, but we know one Person who has: Jesus Christ.

So, how can we show our love to Jesus? It's actually rather easy. We do our best to follow and keep His Commandments. And when we fail, we repent to God and ask for His forgiveness. Instantly, we are forgiven, not by our sake, but by Jesus' sake.

The idea of loving Jesus is all about obedience. After all, Jesus was obedient to His Father to the point of death – His death for us! You see, Christ’s earthly life was a life of obedience. The question for us is this: Who are you obedient to? And: Who do you trust?

As Martin Luther wrote: *“For [Jesus] does not mean to be a Moses to drive and to plague you to threats and terrors, but to give us commandments as you can and will keep without commanding, if you, indeed love Him.”*

The idea here is to give watchful care, to cherish and to hold as a treasure, to take all pains not to lose, or to let others violate Christ’s Commandments. We are to hold ourselves to God’s moral standard.

Thus, whoever cherishes the Commandments will “keep” or “obey” them. This is not by force, but by love.

[Idols]

Again, who are you obedient to? Who do you trust?

During this COVID-19 Pandemic, have you trusted in God, or have you trusted in the government?

In the past, plagues and pandemics would have been understood as either sent by God or allowed by Him for a purpose. In a general sense, the affliction would be a call to repentance.

Not so much today. We are people of science and reason and we try our hardest to remove God from our life. Today, plagues and pandemics have causes that can be explained. God is removed from the equation.

As one governor put it:

“Our behavior has stopped the spread of the virus. God did not stop the spread of the virus. The number is down because we brought the number down. God did not do that. Fate did not do that. Destiny did not do that. A lot of pain and suffering did that.”¹

¹ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/ny-gov-cuomo-on-plateauing-of-covid-19-cases-god-did-not-do-that.html>

So, did we cause COVID-19? This governor is leaving that for us to decide. But, it is more likely that this pandemic is a call to repentance and a call to trust and love in the one true God.

You see, everyday we are tempted to replace the one true God with feeble idols that promise us safety, but these idols never fulfill what they promise.

In our First Reading from Acts 17, the Apostle Paul noticed that Athens was a city full of idols. The Greeks were curious about Paul for some said: ***“What does this babbling wish to say?”*** (Acts 17:18)

You see, many Greeks enjoyed spending their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new (Acts 17:21).

So, Paul took this opportunity to preach about the crucified and risen Jesus. He said: ***“Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you...”*** (Acts 17:22-23)

This unknown god is actually the one True God who has revealed Himself as the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He is the Creator of all and He has redeemed us all through the obedience of the Son by dying and rising for us.

God accomplished salvation for us. We didn't do it. He did it for you and me.

This is portrayed in stanza five of Luther's hymn “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice”:

*God said to His beloved Son:
“It's time to have compassion.
Then go, bright jewel of My crown,
And bring to all salvation.
From sin and sorrow set them free;
Slay bitter death for them that they
May live with You forever.”*

(LSB 556, stanza 5)

[Orphans?]

Returning to the Gospel lesson, Jesus also gave the disciples a sure and certain hope that they would never be alone. He says to them: ***“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever”*** (John 14:16).

This Helper is the Holy Spirit. Although Jesus would soon leave them, He would not leave them empty handed for He says, ***“I will come to you”*** (John 14:18b).

You see, the Holy Spirit is not a substitute for Jesus, because Jesus says, ***“I will come to you.”***

It will only be a little while that the disciples will be orphaned. You see, the death of Jesus will not be like that of a father whose little children are then left orphans. Instead, His death means His return!

Yes, for three days, the disciples would be alone. But He would return! And He did! **Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

But, what about Christ’s upcoming Ascension into heaven? Did He leave them and us as orphans? No! For Christ says, ***“Because I live, you also will live”*** (John 14:19b).

We are never alone, because Christ is living! He lives! With Jesus living then and now, anyone who loves and trusts in Him will never fall into eternal death! Instead, we receive eternal life!

What Jesus is saying is that He lives although He dies. He is saying that He is very Life itself. He swallows up death, so that those who trust in Him shall live!

With Jesus saying ***“I live,”*** we can also speak those words in the face of our death!

In fact, we actually sang those words in our opening hymn:

*Jesus lives! And now is death
But the gate of life immortal;
This shall calm my trembling breath
When I pass its gloomy portal.
Faith shall cry, as fails each sense:
Jesus is my confidence!*

(Jesus Lives! The Victory’s Won, LSB 490, stanza 5)

[We are Not Alone]

Again, Jesus says: ***“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him”*** (John 14:21).

Here we are again. The test of love is always obvious and simple: a true disciple is one who really loves Jesus. The true disciple does more than just say it. The true disciple cherishes and guards every command of Jesus by holding it to their heart and living by it.

Yes, our Gospel text has a lot of Law, but there is also love. You see, we are not alone. We are not left to fend for ourselves.

The opening verse of our text sounds as if our keeping Jesus’ commandments is the proof of our love for Jesus – and *it is saying that*. The closing verse *repeats* that same point, but then it introduces Jesus and the Father’s love for us as the Gospel power to energize our keeping of the Commandments.

Here, in the Divine Service, God does not leave us alone. He is here! He is here leading us to eternal life! Remember, none of us are perfect at keeping the Law, but we know one Person who has: Jesus Christ.

By grace through faith in Christ alone, He makes us perfect! Through Baptism, Confession and Absolution, hearing His Word proclaimed and in receiving the very Body and very Blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, the Triune God sustains us through our life with His boundless love!

It is God the Father who does not leave us empty handed. He gives us all we need through His Son Jesus Christ, who with the Holy Spirit, continue to guide us through His Word to eternal life! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen!

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠