

Easter 6 John 14:15-21 Church of the Redeemer Bethesda MD 5-21-17

It is Passover.

Jesus is with his disciples

In the upper room.

The disciples are anxious

They know

Jesus will soon depart.

Jesus assures them that after he is gone

The Father will send them another

Helper and defender against evil,

the Paraclete.

Jesus declares:

“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.”

Living inside the Beltway,

most of us have some experience with

transactional relationships in which

others withhold consent, agreement or affection

Unless they get what they want.

(Of course, sometime them is us.)

When I first pondered today's lesson from John

I wondered whether Jesus was saying to his disciples

If you want my love or the love of my Father

Follow my commandments!

After a rigorous debate with David Schlafer,

In which we both made our points,

I am here to tell you that is not at all what Jesus said.

The challenge here is

to understand

the levels of meaning and perspective,

and there are several.

We must listen carefully.

Jesus true followers

Are folks who believe in the truth of Jesus

And, consequently, and consciously,

seek to model their lives after his.

Throughout their time together

Jesus was teacher to the disciples.

In the early years of the First Century

Discipleship was not simply

ingesting a set of rules and precepts

laid out by an instructor.

A true disciple

endeavored to be like his teacher—

Following the teacher wherever he went

And listening intently to the teacher's words,

Observing the teacher's interactions with others

And seeking to emulate the teacher's behavior and instincts.

This was love.

Not love in the sense of a groupie's obsession with a rock star

But love in the sense of devotion to a standard of living

displayed by the master.

Not the love that 50 years ago

Impelled me to rush to my then girlfriend's apartment

As soon as class let out,

But love in the sense of the calm commitment and devotion I have

Today to the person who has been

My constant friend and counselor since 1967.

The disciples had the same kind of commitment

to their teacher, friend and counselor but many times more over.

When Jesus says: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments,"

He is saying—

if you follow my lead

I will know you are my disciple, and you will know
God.

When we open ourselves to God's love, and become a disciple,

The natural consequences are

loving God

And neighbor in the ways Jesus taught.

In their brief time together, Jesus was the connection

between the Godhead and

those who recognized Christ's divinity.

Now that Jesus is about to end his journey to Jerusalem,

and challenge death,

Ironically he says to them: "I am coming to you"

and will be with you forever.

Following Christ's passion, the disciples,

Those who know Christ,

Will continue their connection with the Triune God

Through the Spirit of Truth, their Advocate,

Who will have their back just as Jesus did.

Strangers to Christ in the world will not know this spirit

Because they do not know the Truth.

The Truth is not false claims that change

From day to day and are then contradicted in early morning tweets.
The spiritual truth is found
in the interactions of Jesus with humanity
during his time in human flesh,
in the sacrifice he made and why he made it.

Knowing this Truth, we want to follow.

The Truth is who we want to be!
Jesus had been the disciples' helper and guide in righteous living.

In the days to come the indwelling Spirit
who abides with
and is known to those who love and follow Christ
will be their guide
as they confront the world and its dangers,
ever reminding them of Christ's eternal presence.

We know that at the most fundamental level
in this Farewell Discourse Jesus was addressing "his own,"
the disciples who had been

His companions along the Way,
His closest friends, who Jesus loved to the end.

The disciples were fearful. They knew the Romans
Might see targets on their backs too.

Jesus tells them: "I will not leave you orphaned."

Our word orphan comes from

a Greek word that means bereft of a father,

or more broadly, without a teacher, guide or guardian.

My own father was an orphan.

The child of an unmarried woman,

He never knew his father.

In those days, there was no Medicaid, food stamps

or aid to dependent children.

My father spent his early days on a pig farm,

A poor house, where his disgraced mother slopped the pigs

with garbage collected from better neighborhoods.

But even as an infant, my father was blessed with Irish charm.

He was irresistible and two of his aunts

agreed to take him into their care.

Fortunately, his maternal grandparents were

faithful members of the Congregational church.

Led by the indwelling Spirit,

They knew what to do.

They brought my father home.

You do not have to be a fatherless child to be an orphan.

Folks who lose a parent, child, spouse, lover, friend

Or even a job can be orphans too,

in the sense of losing their way,

being without a mooring.

Like the world that cannot receive the spirit of truth

Because it neither knows nor sees the spirit

We could opt for spiritual poverty and be bereft of the Father.

Or as Jesus commands, we can commit our lives to God and neighbor.

We can avoid the orphanage,

come home and embrace

the new connection to the Father and the Son,

Our advocate and helper, the Spirit of Truth.

How do you open your heart to the Spirit?

By loving Jesus.

How do you love Jesus?

By following his commandments to love God and Neighbor, as
Jesus would have done.

How do you love your neighbor?

It is different for each of us.

Often, we know it when the opportunity arises.

Other times we know from our resistance.

Maybe it is a person we stay away from
instead of extending them a hand?

If our hearts are open and we are watchful we will know.

As Jesus says in verses that follow those we heard today:

The Holy Spirit who the Father will send in my name

Will teach you everything and remind you of all
that I have said to you.

Amen.