

May 14, 2023
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

John 14:15-21 (1 Peter 3:13-22)

IF YOU LOVE JESUS, YOU TREASURE HIS COMMANDS.

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St John, the 14th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

A tree is known by its fruit. (cf: Luke 6:43–45) You do not look for apples on a peach tree or acorns on a hickory tree because a tree is known by its fruit. Therefore, it should not surprise you when the unbelievers of the world lie and slander, rape and rob, maim and murder, and perform all sorts of evil and perverse things. They are of the world. They are evil trees bearing bear evil fruit. Christian believers, on the other hand, you should expect to act like Christians, bearing the fruits of the Holy Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. (cf: Galatians 5:22)

They say that “**Talk is cheap,**” meaning it is easier to say something than to do it. It is easy to say you love someone but something quite different to demonstrate that love. It is easy to say that you are a Christian, say that you fear, love, and trust in God above all things. It is easy to **talk the talk** but do you **walk the walk**? Do you outwardly demonstrate your love for God, bearing the fruit of living as a child redeemed in Christ Jesus?

Jesus knows talk is cheap. In our Gospel text this morning He does not say: “*If you love me, then say so.*” He says:

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

He says:

“21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me...”
(John 14:21)

Jesus does not mean only the Ten Commandments but all of His teachings. (cf: Matthew 28:20) So, how is that going for you? If you say you are a Christian, are your inward thoughts defiled and impure or do you delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night? (cf: Psalm 1:2) If you say you trust and believe in Christ do your words and external actions betray your public confession?

Before I go any further, perhaps you recognize a problem here. It sounds as if Jesus is setting us up to fail. It sounds as if He is commanding us to do the impossible – because due to the sinful human nature, you and I cannot keep the Law. We can neither love God nor keep His

Commandments as we ought. So, as my confirmation pastor Rev. Kurt Bickel used to say: *"What we have here is a conundrum."* It is a paradox, a dilemma and problem that you and I cannot solve. And while you and I cannot solve the conundrum, our Triune God can and already has.

It is true, the Ten Commandment and all of Jesus' teachings are God's good and gracious will for how you are to live your life. Just because you cannot keep them as good as you ought does not mean that you should not try to do your best. It is true that the fruit you bear is not going to be perfect. Sometimes your fruit will be marginal at best! It is true that your good works and deeds do not add one dot or iota toward your salvation. Jesus has already accomplished your salvation on the cross. God does not need your good works. As St Paul told the men of Athens at the Areopagus:

"The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." (Acts 17:24–25)

God does not *need* your good works – but your neighbor *does*. All God wants is your love, obedience, and faith. He wants you to keep His commands and serve and love your neighbor so that you show your faith to the world. And because you and I can neither love God nor keep His Commandments as we ought, God went to work for you.

Our Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit always does all the work and you dear believer, merely receive His gifts. God always has more and more to give. He always has more and more for you to receive. Since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything, long before you breathed your first breath, God loved you with a sacrificial love. In his first epistle letter St John writes:

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:9–10)

Our Gospel lesson takes place in the Upper Room just a few hours before Judas would betray Jesus, handing Him over to sinful men who would brutally beat Him within an inch of His life and then nail Him to the cross where He would suffer and die for your sins and the sins of the whole world. Before His disciples witness the blood and gore, Jesus teaches and prepares them for His coming death, resurrection, and ascension, in which He would be seen no more and yet seen; in which He would depart and yet come to His disciples.

Jesus was about to give all that He had, His very own life, for your life and the life of the world, suffering all God's wrath against the sin of the world. Three days later He would rise from the dead, conquering death and the grave. Forty days later He would ascend into heaven and be seated at the right hand of the Father, disappearing in a cloud not to be seen again until the Last Day when He appears in glory to judge the living and the dead. And here, on the eve of His death, He speaks of giving even more. He says:

“... I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive...” (John 14:16–17)

Not only do you get the Father and the Son, you also get another Helper, a mediator and advocate who intercedes for you before the Father with groanings too deep for words. (cf: Romans 8:26) He is not a **replacement** Helper but **another** Helper, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. He will convict and convince the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. He leads and guides you into all truth. (cf: John 16:13) Whatever He is given to speak from the Father and the Son, He mysteriously imparts it to you. This is the Spirit by whom you were born again from above in the waters of Baptism, (cf: John 3:5) which St Peter tells us:

“... now saves you... as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 3:21)

The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit, for it neither sees Him nor knows Him. The world, which is the unbelieving world, is known by its fruit. It only deals with what is seen and knowable by reason and senses – and whatever satisfies its greed and lustful desires. At one time the world was content to do its evil in the shadows and darkness. But now they not only perform their evil in the broad daylight, but they also demand that you consecrate and celebrate their evil. And if you do not celebrate their wicked and perverse ways, wear their ribbon, and wave their flag, you will be attacked. You will suffer their wrath and bear their judgment. But Jesus warned us that this is the way it would be. He said:

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”
(John 15:18–19)

What is the Christian to do? Jesus says:

“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Jesus knows talk is cheap. He says:

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

The word "keep" in this verse means ***"to retain, guard, cherish and hold as a treasure."*** (ANLEX, 379) In verse 15, Jesus is not prescribing ***what you must do***, but is describing a reality that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you indeed do. It is as if He is saying: ***“If you love me then you will guard, cherish, and hold as a treasure all my commands and take pains not to let others violate them.”*** (cf: Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel, 995) He is not issuing a command, per se, but stating the way that things are for those who have the Holy Spirit. The Church loves Jesus and because of her love of Jesus, she guards His Word as the most precious treasure of all. His Word guides and directs the Church in her doing of the ***“greater works.”***

In the washing of the water and the Word God has given you forgiveness of sins, faith, and the Holy Spirit, the Helper and advocate who will stay with you forever. Regarding the Helper that is sent from the Father and the Son, Martin Luther writes that it is as if Jesus were saying:

“... neither the world nor the devil will deprive you of Him, no matter how they rant and rave. He will strengthen you and make you courageous and bold, far better than I can now do by My physical presence. Moreover, He is wiser and more learned than all the world. Therefore you will not lack for comfort, strength, courage, and wisdom.” (LW 24, 101)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, a tree is known by its fruit. It should not surprise you when the unbelievers of the world are corrupt and perverse and behave like the unbelieving world. They are evil trees bearing bear evil fruit. And this also means you should expect Christians to act like Christians, bearing the fruits of the Holy Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. (cf: Galatians 5:22)

From the foundation of the world God saw that you could neither love Him nor keep His Commandments as you ought. So out of His great love and mercy His sent His only Son into the world to be your Savior. Out of Jesus’ great love and compassion, He entered His creation in the flesh of man, not to be served, but to serve, giving everything He had, His body, His blood, His very life, to accomplish salvation on Calvary’s cross **for you**, winning victory over sin, death, and the devil. He has risen from the dead and ascended back to the Father. Because He lives you and all who trust and believe in Him also will live forever. (cf: John 14:19)

He has not left you as orphans, but still comes to you. By the power of the Spirit you see Him with eyes of faith. He comes to you and manifests Himself to you in the waters of Baptism, in the Word of His Absolution, in the preaching of the Gospel of Christ and Him crucified, and in His body and blood in His Holy Supper. You were united with Him in Baptism where you received all His gifts won on the cross: namely forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation. You know that God loves and reveals Himself to you and all those who love and believe Christ – a love shown by guarding and treasuring His Word.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.