

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (A)

John 14:15-21
April 27, 2008

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Wichita, Kansas

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

In today's Gospel, Jesus continues what is known as his "Farewell Discourse." He knows that he is going to be betrayed and crucified, and he is preparing his disciples not only for his death, but also for that time after he has ascended into heaven — that time when he will no longer be with them in bodily form here on earth.

Jesus tell his disciples,
If you love me, you will keep my commandments. . .
They who have my commandments and keep them
are those who love me. . .

Jesus says, if you love him, you will keep his commandments. Now, Christ had done a great deal of teaching and expounding on the Law, but he summed up his commandments in the 22nd chapter of St. Matthew where he says,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul and with all your mind. . .
[and] you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Those are the two great commandments Jesus gave. And again, he says, if you love him, you will keep his commandments.

Loving Jesus, trusting in him, believing in him, having faith in him, is not just an intellectual matter. Loving Jesus isn't simply believing that he existed and that he had some wise things to say. Loving Jesus — believing in him, isn't just a matter of having your name on a membership roster. Nor is it just a matter of supporting the Church with your time, talents and finances. Loving Jesus, is not just a matter of worshiping on Sunday mornings.

Now Jesus certainly did exist. He said wise things, and it is important that we know about him and what he said and did.

Further, it's important we are active in a congregation, and that we support the Church with the various resources at our disposal.

And, it is of utmost importance that we gather together for worship on the Lord's Day, that we hear the Word of God proclaimed, and that we are joined to one another and to Christ in the sacrament of his Body and Blood.

But, none of those things alone, taken by itself, is the keeping of Christ's commands to us. They are all important, but none of them, in and of itself — by itself — is enough.

For to love Christ, to trust him and have faith in him, necessarily means obeying his commandments. And they are summed up in his Law of love. Love for God. And love for your fellow human beings. To love Christ is to love God

and one another.

So, loving Christ is always *active*, not passive. It is living, breathing, and growing. It is to *be* your life, each day.

This relationship cannot be relegated to the intellectual sphere alone. It is not just a matter of empirical facts — important though they are. Nor can it pertain to only a portion of your life. It cannot be relegated to a certain time of the week: Sunday morning. Our worship again, is vital and essential to a life of love with Christ, but it cannot stop there.

This living relationship, this life of love to which Christ has called you, is for every minute of every day, every day of the week, every week of the year. In all of your doings, at home and at work and at school — with all whom you encounter — friends, family, co-workers, strangers and even enemies — your love of Christ is to shine forth in your love for others.

Fred Craddock comments on this text, and writes the following:

*In order to understand this and other passages. . .that join love and obedience, the reader must think of love as other than feeling. Feelings are not commanded, but love can be, for to love is to **be for** another person, to **act for** another's good, to **do that** which brings benefit to the other. This is much more than liking a person or having a particular set of feelings. . .To love obediently is to submit to God's own precedent . . .even if loving costs dearly, as God's love did.*

—Preaching Through the Christian Year A

Preacher Flor McCarthy imagines Christ sharing his commandments with us today, and he fleshes them out like this. First some “don’ts” from Jesus:

Don't return evil for evil. Nothing is achieved by retaliation, except to pile darkness upon darkness.

Don't judge your neighbour. No one knows all the facts in any particular case except God. Therefore, leave judgement to God.

Don't condemn your neighbour. . .If you are not to pass judgment on your neighbour, neither are you to pass sentence on him.

Don't worry about food, and drink, and clothes, as if these were the most important things in life. Make it your first concern to live a life worthy of a son or a daughter of God, and all the rest will fall into place. . .

Don't give up hope when times are rough. Keep on trusting in me and in the Father.

And then some “do’s” from Jesus:

Do let the light of your goodness shine before people. The light you shed will help others to find their way, and the Father will be glorified.

Do love your enemies. To be kind to those you don’t like, or who may have been unkind to you, is hard. But if you do this, you will be the salt of the earth.

Do give generously. The measure you give to others, will be the measure you receive from God.

Do forgive those who sin against you. Then you have nothing to fear in regard to your own sins. God has already forgiven them.

Do take this bread and eat it. Take the cup and drink it. Do this in memory of me. In the Eucharistic Banquet you will find the nourishment you need to live as my disciples.

Now of course, this is a high calling from our Lord Jesus. Indeed it is a very difficult command for us to follow. And it would be easy for us to despair. After all, when we look at ourselves and consider our lives, we know that we often fail to fulfill this law of love. In our standard order for Confession, we pray, “*we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.*” We have not perfectly kept Christ’s command to us.

Does that mean then, that our relationship with Christ is ended? Does it mean that he is no longer our Savior and that we no longer enjoy the mercy, grace, and forgiveness of our God? **NO.**

Your relationship to God through Christ, is just that, ***through Christ***. And it has its foundation not in your works, not in your love, but rather in ***Christ’s promises***, and ***his love*** for you.

We ***don’t*** keep Christ’s commandments ***so that*** he will love us. We keep his commandments ***because*** he loves us. During the same supper Jesus said, “*Love one another as I have love you.*” It was he who first loved the apostles, and it is he who first loves you.

C.S. Lewis once wrote: “*[The Christian] does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.*” When Jesus spoke these words, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments,*” he wasn’t talking to strangers who were wondering about whether they should follow him. Jesus was talking to his very own disciples,

talking to those whom he had already chosen and called to be his own. He wasn't giving them a new condition for following him. He was simply fleshing out and further explaining what it meant for them to be his disciples.

So too, you are not strangers to Jesus. And this is not some new condition for you to fulfill in order to become God's child. God has already called you and marked you as his own in Holy Baptism. God has already named you as his child. But now — *as his child* — now you need to know what that means for your life. And here Jesus tells you that yours is to be a life of love. Love for God, and love for one another.

And as a further comfort, Jesus promises his disciples — and he promises you — that he will send the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to be with you. He will send him to strengthen you in this walk of faith, in this life of love.

Jesus promises, "*I will not leave you orphaned.*" He does not give you this command to love God and one another, and then abandon you. You are not left on your own, as an orphan, with only your own devices, to fend for yourself and try to live this life of love. If such were the case, then you would be right to despair of your failings.

But Jesus hasn't left you alone. He has sent, and he continues to send you the Holy Spirit, and through him you can follow Christ's command to love.

Your loving is imperfect while you are yet here on earth. But in the Holy Spirit, Christ himself fulfills that which he commands in you.

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

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.