

Commandments cherished; Divine Love manifested

John 14:15-21

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 17, 2020

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

Our text, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week, Jesus told us not to let our hearts be troubled, for He is the Way to the Father and, through this Way that is our Savior, we will know the Truth and have the Life of the world to come. This morning's text is a continuation of those comments, so imagine His sermon continuing as you hear Jesus now say these words: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

And, just like that, our hearts are troubled again!, because we know that we have not perfectly kept his commandments! Life *before* this pandemic was already quite accustomed to the call to repentance (maybe even complacent toward its regularity!), and now - within the weeks of this pandemic - do we not see myriads of ways we have not kept the commandments? How many of us have - every waking minute - *truly* feared, loved and trusted in God **above all things**...including hand sanitizer or toilet paper or a mortal named Fauci? How many of us have - with absolute boldness and confidence - called upon the name of the Lord, certain that His will and timing is always best? How many of us have always loved our neighbors as ourselves; do we distance ourselves

from our neighbor instinctively from fear they may make us ill, or out of love and not desiring to endanger our neighbor? Or, how many of us, in all our spare time, have found new and novel ways to sin?! (Suddenly, Luther's Small Catechism self-examination, which begins, "Have you been lazy..." hits home!)

So, when Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," we instinctively shutter and withdraw in shame. Only the lawyer whose pride elicited from Jesus the parable of the Good Samaritan would assume he'd kept all the commandments! So, how can we rightly say we love Jesus? Isn't Christian love more than a sentiment and feeling? Isn't it also carried out in conduct and practice? In other words, if we haven't kept his commandments, and if we haven't perfectly loved him, how can we think the words of comfort that follow apply to us? How can we take any comfort in this text?

First, we ought understand that the word for "keep" is a word that means "watch over, cherish, safeguard." It doesn't mean "stiff outward obedience." This insight ought teach us that Jesus' point isn't simply to get us to "obey," but rather to "love and have confidence in" his commandments... not because these commandments "earn your way to the Father" but because these are the commandments of the one who *is* the Way to the Father and, apart from this One, your way is utterly lost and hopeless. So, if He is your Way, and your life is safe in Him, then why would we doubt His will for our lives; why would we *not* cherish and safeguard and watch over all things He has given us to live by... for he has not merely given us to live by "laws or rules," but we

would do better to understand those commandments by the word “wisdom.” If Jesus knows these commandments are the best teaching tool for His beloved Church, why would we second-guess him?

We only would because we still have the Old Adam about our neck, constantly seeking to convince us that our way, our wisdom is best. Indeed, the wolf prowling outside the sheepfold is only dangerous because the sheep themselves love to wander!

And so, because our Good Shepherd knows that His beloved sheep can easily be led astray by “the wolf within” (if you will), He requests of the Father an additional Helper for you - One to comfort you, One to keep your eyes and minds and hearts from wandering, and to keep you fixed on Christ Jesus. In fact, that One is intricately linked to Jesus, as the title implies: “The Spirit of Truth.” Didn’t - just a few verses earlier (as we heard last week) Jesus call himself “the Way, **the Truth**, and the Life”? To now refer to the Comforter as the Spirit of *Truth* means that One is the Spirit who keeps you in Christ Jesus. Sadly, how many there are who think that the Comforter is the Spirit of His *own* Truth... that He will give you a *new* Truth, an “extra-Biblical” truth, a novel truth beyond and apart from Jesus. But Jesus is the Truth, so that the job of the “Spirit of Truth” is to keep your eyes and heart and mind fixed on Jesus. Indeed, to call him “the Spirit of Truth” is to call him “the Spirit of Christ, faithful to Christ.”

And so, Jesus says in verse 16 of our text, that Comforter is sent by the Father and the ascended Son to remain with you into the age... all the way to salvation and to the day that Christ comes again in His

glory to raise you from the grave, separate the sheep from the goats, and bring you to the life of the world to come. In fact, didn't we recently learn in our catechism memorization that the Holy Spirit, "On the last day... will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers *in Christ*" ... notice, always pointing us to Jesus.

Now, Jesus says in our text that the world does not know or perceive the Spirit, but that you know him for he abides with you and is in you. Consider a real-life example of what Jesus means: during this pandemic, how many societal leaders - not rightly knowing that the Spirit works "incarnationally" through Word and Sacraments - have said that the Church should stay home and depend on virtual worship. They don't understand that the Spirit of Truth works through Baptism (which can't be done "virtually") and that He works through the proclaimed absolution (which can't be proclaimed to a faceless "virtual" people) and that He works through the sacrament of the Altar (which can't be distributed "virtually"). Yes, we who have - since the day of our Baptism - been blessed with the gift who is the Holy Spirit, we hunger and thirst for the means by which that Holy Spirit faithfully keeps us with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

And, as the Spirit keeps us with Jesus, then Jesus may naturally say in our text, "I will not leave you as orphans. I am coming to you." Coming to us in the Word and Sacrament, but all with a view toward (and as *the Way* toward) that day in which He will visibly come again in His glory and visibly fulfill the hope of the psalmist in that beloved 27th psalm, "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the

land of the living!” As we eagerly await and look forward to that day of final deliverance, we have every reason not to fear illness or death, but rather to delight in His gifts and dwell in his house and - upon receiving His gifts of forgiveness and faith’s sustenance - sing the Church’s refrain: “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace (even depart from this life!) according to Your Word.” Yes, that word of gracious promise that frees us to delight in His Word of holy will... that word of promise that enlivens us with faith’s desire to cherish and watch over and safeguard His commandments.

It’s not coincidental that the psalms are always proclaiming the delight to dwell in the house of the Lord: in that same beloved 27th psalm I just referenced, we hear the psalmist cry:

One thing have I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to inquire in his temple.

Notice that last phrase... “to inquire in His temple.” Why in the temple, in the house of the Lord? Because *there in that house... here in this house* is where we have that intimate dwelling with and are divinely cared for by the Spirit of Truth and by the Truth Himself.

This pandemic situation and shelter-in-place has caused one of two reactions among those who desire the Way, the Truth, and the Life. On the one hand, are those who - wanting to comfort us while being

temporarily torn away from the sanctuary - rationalized that we can have Jesus and His Spirit apart from going to a church; after all, it *is* true that the Word can fill our ears and minds and hearts by the Word being read in our homes or listened to online. But, while that *is* true, those well-intended voices have perhaps unintentionally downplayed the Scripture's desire (and remember, Scripture was authored by the Holy Spirit for the faithful) to dwell in the house of the Lord, and folks who've downplayed that have done so as a well-intended way to keep calm those Christians who - "naturally according to their Baptism" - have felt the jeopardy of *not* being in the house of the Lord.

On the other hand have been those who - not wanting to replace short-term comfort for big-picture truth, not willing to declare "a new normal" - have maintained that the Christian must not be torn away from the sanctuary... that, though Jesus and His Spirit can keep our smoldering wicks burning through the scarcest availability of the Word, such is not Jesus' plans nor will for His beloved Church, his chosen race, his royal priesthood, his holy nation and people for his own possession. Rather, when the psalmist defiantly asserts, "The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?", that psalmist boldly asserts that with those words near on its heels:

One thing have I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to inquire in his temple.

Friends, through the lessons learned by this pandemic, may we never again take for granted the communion of saints that gazes upon the beauty of the Lord in His Word and Sacraments (as we sing following the divine feast, “mine eyes have seen your salvation”) ... and not only is that communion of saints gathered by the Spirit of Truth “to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord,” but also “to *inquire* in his temple” - what does that inquiring mean but to learn of and meditate upon, to ask questions of, to cherish and safeguard and watch over his Holy commandments that convey His divine will for us. Or, as Jesus says it in our text, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Do not let your hearts be troubled over that phrase. Jesus does not say “If you love me, you will perfect my commandments.” His point is not keeping them to save yourself, but cherishing them as God’s good and holy will for you. Keeping them not as with a burdened conscience, but with the free conscience that is ours in the blood of Jesus, “who suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” Indeed, how perfectly did Christ love You, that He kept the Father’s commandments, cherished the Father’s holy will for the Messiah, and willingly laid down his life for your free and certain salvation. So, rather than having hearts troubled over your own inability to “be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect,” instead - with a free and clear conscience in Jesus - rejoice that, as we inquire in his temple, here we have Christ’s own word of promise that the Spirit of Truth will do His work through Word and Sacrament to keep us with Jesus Christ

in the one true faith and that “he who loves Me will be loved by my
Father and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.”

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

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