

John 14.15-21 - “Getting the Word Out”

Pr. Kurt A. VanFossan - Easter 6A 2023

Our Gospel reading is a continuation of Jesus’ words to the twelve apostles during the Last Supper, where we heard Jesus, in last week’s Gospel, say to His disciples, “*Let not your hearts be troubled.*” But then Jesus’ words at the beginning of our Gospel reading for today may trouble us because He says, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*” The more we consider our failure to “*keep*” God’s commandments in the sense of obeying them, the more these words condemn the sinful nature in all of us which doesn’t love God or want to obey His commandments.

But there’s another part of us that does love God if we, by the grace of God, know and believe that He loves us and was willing to become a man in Jesus Christ so that He could suffer the death we deserve because of our sins through His death on a cross, and then rise from the dead to assure us of His victory over our sins, death and the devil, and give us faith in this Good News. Therefore, as people who love and have faith in Jesus as our Savior, but who still struggle with the desires of our sinful nature, how are we to hear these words, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*”

The Greek word for “*keep*” can also be translated “*cherish*” or “*hang-on to.*” A little later Jesus said, “*If anyone loves me, he will keep [cherish] my word.*” This is an important way that Jesus wants us to hear these words.

Our love for God comes from hearing His words in the Bible about His love for us, and His work for our eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. Therefore, according to our God given faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, we do cherish His words in the Bible, including His commandments. For, once Jesus frees us from the impossible burden of trying to save ourselves through our perfect obedience of God’s commandments, God enables us to see Him in a whole new light. We see Him not only as our Creator but also as our Savior who loves us and knows what’s best for us. So we cherish His commandments, where He tells us what’s best for us, and we want to keep them.

But even then, because of our sinful nature, we fail to cherish and keep God’s word the way we, according to our God given faith, would like to. That’s one of the reasons Jesus continued in our text by promising, “*And I will give you another Helper, to be with You forever...the Spirit of truth.*”

“*Another Helper*” suggests that the Holy Spirit doesn’t work alone. Instead, He works in union with the Father and the Son. All three members of our Triune God work together to help us with what we need the most, faith in God’s word of love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. And what does God work through to give us faith in His promise of salvation, and consequently the desire to cherish His Word and obey His will for our lives? God works chiefly through His Word. The Bible is God’s saving presence among us in black and white.

I’ve mentioned to some of you recently that my mom (thinking of mothers on this mother’s day) use to say to us kids that it’s not correct to say that you love inanimate objects like chocolate or a book. You may like or enjoy these things, but you don’t love them because love speaks of relationships between people who can love.

If that rule of grammar was followed, it would be a good confession of our Christian faith to say, “I love the Bible.” I may enjoy reading a book like this one about the Backroads of Colorado, but I love reading this book—the Bible. For the Bible, even though it looks like an inanimate object, is unlike any other book. God promises to always be with His Word to speak to us. We speak to God through prayer. He speaks to us through His Word. And through His almighty words in the Bible, through which He created the universe, He continues to give us new and eternal life by creating, strengthening and sustaining our faith in Jesus as our Savior from sin, death, and all the forces of evil.

So, what do you suppose our sinful nature is most intent on turning us away from? The Word of God, especially the Good News about Jesus Christ. It wants to cut off our communication and relationship with God and His Word of Truth so that it can mislead us with a bunch of lies. And the longer we are separated from the Word of God in the Bible, the weaker our new life of faith in Jesus Christ becomes, making it easier for our sinful nature to keep us turned away from God.

We can sometimes see this happen in our lives—this turning away from God and His Word—when we’re upset with God because He hasn’t answered our prayers the way we think and prayed He would. And when we’re upset with someone, we usually don’t want to be around them. That’s when we often stop cherishing God’s Word.

Thankfully our turning away from God doesn’t turn God away from us. Instead, the Lord continues to seek His lost sheep, usually through other concerned Christians who are not afraid to share with us God’s Word of Truth in love in order to reconnect us with His Word of Law (which exposes our sinful nature) and Gospel (which assures of God’s love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ), thus enabling us to repent of our sinful self-centered ways and to trust in God during good times and bad.

All glory be to God, the Father. Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

[Children’s Sermon] I’ve been talking in the sermon about the importance of hearing. It’s important because it’s through God’s words in the Bible that we hear first and foremost about Jesus Christ, who is God, and who became a man so that He could set us free from our sins through His death on a cross and rise from the dead to give us faith in this Good News. Once we know and believe this Good News about Jesus’ death and resurrection, God works through us to tell others about Jesus.

Let’s do that right now using this rose as an illustration. How do the thorns on this rose remind us about our Savior, Jesus Christ? [Jesus’ crown of thorns; part of His suffering on the cross, which lead to His death].

How does this red rose remind us of our Savior, Jesus Christ. [He shed his blood to give us eternal life].

Do you know who also suffered and shed blood to give you life? Your mom, when you were born. But the best thing your mom did for you is to have you baptized and tell you about Jesus.

So, let’s thank God for giving us mothers, who were willing to suffer to give us physical life, and especially for telling us about Jesus, by giving your mom one of these roses.