

Year A Easter 6 If you love me John 14 vv15 to 21

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Our gospel reading starts and ends with that same idea...Love Jesus – keep his commandments. Keep his commandments – Love Jesus. Those are the bookends to the reading. What are Jesus' commandments? We all know them...the two great commandments that sum up all the law and the prophets: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

So...we love God, known to us through Jesus Christ, and we love our neighbour. That is what we need to do for salvation. It sounds simple enough but, of course, it's not. The details are the crux of the matter. Not only must we love God but we must love him with all our heart, soul, and mind. **That's** a challenge. Loving a person generally means you think about that person a lot. You desire to be with this person and talk to this person, get to know this person more and more. You would likely want to tell others about this person, singing their praises. It will be the same for us in our love for God – wanting to spend time in God's presence which we are when we gather together, talking to God in prayer, singing God's praises, getting to know God more and more through worship, prayer, and reading and studying God's word. Outside of the brief time we spend together each week, does the rest of our week demonstrate a love of God who is loved with all our heart, soul, and mind?

And how about our neighbours? Do we love our neighbours as we love ourselves? The ones we never see much are easy to love but how about the other ones? After a week of rain, I woke up to a beautiful sunny Saturday morning and decided to get the laundry done right away and put it out in the nice weather to dry. As I walked out into my backyard with my basket full of wet clothes, I came face to face with a

huge tent set up in my yard. And, it wasn't **my** tent. A little investigating quickly led to the discovery that my neighbour had ended her camping trip on a rainy day and, because her yard wasn't big enough to set up the tent, she had set it up to dry in my yard...without asking. Did I love my neighbour as I looked at that monstrosity of a tent drying in my yard, flattening the grass underneath of it? I have to say, I wasn't thrilled with her at that moment... "she should have asked," I thought to myself. "I wouldn't have said no but she should have asked."

And, of course, by "neighbour" Jesus isn't just talking about the people next to us or across from us or even down the road. He's talking about everyone. The smelly guy who sits next to you on the airplane and talks too much. The lady who's a friend of a friend who comes out for dinner and keeps talking with her mouth full of food. And it gets worse. Jesus expects us to love the dirty, shaggy-haired guy with a missing front tooth who stretches his hand out toward us asking for money as we walk by...the lady in a dress five sizes too big with one knee-high stocking down at her ankle, standing on the street corner yelling obscenities at someone only she can see...the ones we would rather cross the street to avoid...the ones we don't invite home for dinner or to the church picnic...Jesus loves those ones too....There is an extremely important distinction to note here. Jesus does not command us to help others. He commands us to love others. There is a huge difference.

How do **we** learn to love those people? How do **we** love so that God is first and everything else is second? How do we love like that?

Thankfully, in between the bookends that tell us to love like that, we are told how this is accomplished – the mechanics of how it is done and, more importantly, the

confidence to do it – both of these things need the presence of the Holy Spirit – both hinge on the phrase “I will not leave you orphaned.”

First the mechanics. How is it that we remain connected with God and are able to love like Christ loves? Today’s Gospel reading takes us back to Jesus’ last night with his disciples. The feet have been washed. Supper has been eaten. And Jesus has told them he’s leaving them and they cannot follow where he is going. But, as they sit there, shocked, dismayed, and protesting, Jesus says to them “Don’t worry. I will not leave you orphaned.” We are children of God and, if we are not orphaned, that means God is still with us. The Holy Spirit that dwells within each of us connects us to God through Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit is love. The Holy Spirit pulls us gently, teaches us, and guides us to where we need to be and, most importantly, the Holy Spirit transforms us into love. The greatest vehicle for that transformation is in our worship together – in how we pray, what we pray, what we learn, what we experience with all of our senses, and in the time spent with God and with each other. We learn how to love and we learn how to be love.

Now the confidence. We are not orphaned. People who are afraid turn inward; they keep to themselves and they keep their possessions to themselves. People who are not confident in themselves find it difficult to lift up others. People who are afraid and feeling powerless often lash out at others, put others down...but...

We have the Holy Spirit – the helper – with us, enfolding us within the embrace of the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit...bringing us into their relationship, into their love so that we can love. Let’s just pause for a moment to think on that astounding reality...the Holy Spirit within us draws *us* into the life of the *Trinity*. We are with God. God is with us...at every moment.

We have the Holy Spirit keeping us connected to the love of God, connected to God so that when I'm done my coffee and my Morning Prayer I can still have God with me. I can learn to be aware of God's constant presence...I can learn – we all can learn – to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. It does take conscience effort and it does take practice.

When we are mindful of God's loving presence it guides us into love of others. The woman sitting next to me through our Synod gathering this past week told me that love of God is helping her learn to reread her emails and her texts before sending, altering her words to be kind and understanding where she used to be angry and hurtful. Filled with God's love – being God's love. The confidence of God's love within us leads us to taking the outstretched hand of the homeless person on the street, giving not just a few dollars but giving love in some words of care, words that build relationship. Filled with God's love – being God's love.

“Keeping the commandments does not make Jesus present to us. It makes us present to the already ongoing reality of Jesus' presence. The commandments do not earn us Jesus' love they reveal our love for him, a love that originates in his abiding love and presence within us” (Michael K. Marsh, *Interrupting the Silence* website, sermon posted May 30, 2011). Filled with God's love and sharing God's love, we push back the darkness of this world and replace it with the light of God's presence. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.”

If you love me, says Jesus, you will keep my commandments.