

Prayer of the Day:

Father of lights, every good and perfect gift comes from you. Inspire us to think those things that are true and long for those things that are good, that we may always make our petitions according to your gracious will; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Alleluia. (John 14:23 cf. NIV)

TEXT: John 14:15-21

15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." (NIV84)

Sermon Text:

Last week, we had the opportunity to hear the Words which directly precede the words of our lesson today. Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life. The only real and workable way to heaven. Today, well the conversation continues and as it does Jesus begins to help us see how this truth will influence our everyday lives, yes, everything we think and say and do. So **SINCE JESUS IS THE WAY WE FOLLOW AFTER BY THE POWER HE ALONE PROVIDES.**

Does the verse at the beginning of the lesson sound a little odd this morning? "*If you love me, you will obey what I command.*" Especially when it again appears at the end of the section we consider today. *Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.* Do those words start a full-tilt panic within your heart and mind? They should.

The commands of our God read like a bad report card at the end of the school year. God said love Him with everything we have, keeping Him first in our lives and the truth is we have loved any number of other things more than Him and time spent with Him. He urges love of neighbor but we struggle to get past love of self. He would have us spend ourselves, our time, our talents, our treasures in pursuit of Him and the hope we have the privilege to proclaim but we are often too spent from chasing after our own tails to devote more or anything at all to him. The list could go on and on and in some cases perhaps the grade even trends a bit higher than in others but in the end, well if my work and effort prove my love or earn God's love and presence, well Paul told the Romans, *no will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the Law we becomes conscious of sin* (Romans 3:20). And Isaiah lamented, "*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.* (Isaiah 64:6)." But then that's not what Jesus is saying not in our lesson today and not in the wide context of this section or Scripture.

Jesus tells us, “*The world cannot accept him (that’s the Holy Spirit), because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*” In other words, the disciples can love only because the Spirit is already at work within them, because they are already saved, because there is nothing left to earn or prove. One commentator wrote, “*God’s love both precedes and follows our love (Hendrikson).*”

That’s the only way we can truly understand this section of Scripture, without ending up at odds with our God, which is obviously the opposite of Jesus’ intent here. For when God’s love, precedes and follows our own, well instead of the guilt which comes from our sin, there is comfort and hope in a God who cares for us. John will later write, *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* Because God cares for you, He calls you to show love to Him by remaining in His love, living for Him, and listening to Him and His commands, just as any loving Father would seek to do for His children. Because God cares for the apostles and all of us, He even sends His Spirit into their hearts, for them in a special our pouring at Pentecost, for us in the saving grace of Baptism, the regular hearing of His Word and the reception of Christ’s Holy Supper. It’s a never-ending loop of God’s love as He blesses us as we return our love to Him.

These truths then provide Jesus’ disciples with comfort and hope, even though He may disappear from view for a while. *18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.* Jesus will die. Next Thursday we’ll even rejoice in the fact that He ascends into the heights of heaven to guard and guide His Church throughout time and into eternity. However, Jesus will not be gone!

Easter Sunday would be the first major proof of that for those lonely ladies laded with sorrow on the way to the tomb and the despairing disciples locked behind closed doors. His words would be fulfilled as He actually came to them. Fast forward past Ascension to the celebration of Pentecost when again the Holy Spirit, the other counselor would come to them, miraculously growing the Church through the proclamation of the Word. Growing the Church’s love even as it leads it to desire to obey all of the Father’s will.

He even continues to come to the disciples today. He comes to us, even though the world struggles to see how, His people do not. He told us, *For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them* (Matthew 18:20). He’s here right now. In the same means of grace through which he continually cares of us, He stands among us, guarding and guiding His church and sending His Spirit into our lives. We are not orphans. We are not left alone. *Because He lives we also will live!* Not even death can separate us from our loving Savior and our Gracious God.

Oh that doesn’t mean that our brains don’t struggle to grasp that truth. It was Paul who once said, “*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known* (1 Corinthians 13:12).” But just as the Holy Spirit was working in those words of Paul, so He continues to work in the Word and Sacraments today that we might be solidified in that glorious truth that just as Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Christ, so our Savior lives in each of us, within our hearts through that gift of faith forever connected to His people.

Want proof? Look around you today. See your fellow Christians seated in the pews and realize that the love of Christ is alive and well. Here we find people who care about each other. You care about listening to living in the Words and commands of your God. Here there are people

who even press all that they are and have into service of God's kingdom of grace as we hold out that message locally and abroad whether with dollars and cents, the very talents God has given or with the short amount of time we have in this world of ours. This would not be the case unless Jesus was at work, sending His Spirit, strengthening your faith surrounding you in His love. Is it perfect, of course not. We will always be able to grow in love as we more deeply appreciate all our Savior has done for us. Yes, Jesus' love will both precede and follow our own inspiring it, shaping it, building it.

In the next several weeks much is about to change. Our worship schedule will be the least of them. Thursday night we will celebrate the reality in which we live as Jesus returns to His Father's side in heaven. In two weeks, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and then the pivot from our half year of the life of Christ to a deeper look at the life of the church. What a fitting couple of lessons to focus us on our relationship with our resurrected Lord. Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life. The only real and workable way to heaven. Because He is, this truth will influence our everyday lives, yes, everything we think, and say, and do. Yes, **SINCE JESUS IS THE WAY WE FOLLOW AFTER BY THE POWER HE ALONE PROVIDES.** Amen!