

John 15:9–17

1 John 5:1–6

Commandments

I have to say I was surprised. I looked up the definition of the word commandment. Every one of the definitions I found made reference to a divine commandment, particularly the Ten Commandments. I had not expected that. I thought the first definition would have something to say about instruction, direction, expectation, but I did not anticipate the divine to be right at the top of the definitions for the word commandment. Especially in this day and age. But there it was.

Both the readings from the Gospel of John and that of 1 John make reference to commandments. Four times in this short passage from the Gospel we hear about commandments, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” (10) “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (12) “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (14) and finally, “I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.” (17)

The again in the reading from 1 John we hear in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 5, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”

So what is all this about commandments? First off, this is not about the Ten Commandments in a strictest sense, but it is certainly about the greatest commandments as we hear of them in the Gospel of Matthew when Jesus responds to the question of what is the greatest commandment saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matt 22:37-40)

Hearing words such as this, especially anything to do with being commanded, can make some of us lash back with thoughts or actual words of “there is no way in hell you can tell me what to do.” However, there are those who serve in the military and know that a command can save one’s life and where commands can bring you together to work in sync and with purpose.

Or in an operating room where the doctor makes a command for a needed surgical tool or course of action. It can also be a simple yet stern command of a parent to a child to stay of the road. Direct but effective if you want the child to stay alive.

The commandments as given in these two scriptures are also very direct and to the point. No mincing of words, basically, obey God, be obedient to God by loving God and loving those God loves – which happens to be everyone! For most of us that is a big ask, or in the words of scripture a command. For starters it can be hard to love some of our own family members let alone a neighbour, then we remember that for God our neighbour is every other person walking the face of the earth, and I would hazard to guess that it would be near impossible to find a person who hasn't had a problem loving someone God would consider our neighbour.

Take that same concept onto the world stage and you can see that loving neighbour is akin to someone being asked what they want for Christmas and they respond with "world peace." That makes all of us want to wish for it but also roll our eyes because we know how impossible that is for us human beings.

I have been preaching from 1 John for a few weeks now and each week the focus has been on loving others and by loving others we show that we love God. This fifth chapter of John flips that by say we know we love others when we love God and all of this hinges on believing that Jesus is the Christ, was born into the world as a fully human baby, but also is fully God's Son. That line about "everyone who loves the parent loves the child" is saying that if you love God, the parent, then you love Jesus, the child of God.

This all can feel very convoluted, and it is not fully comprehensible to us as well, we are not God. Though we cannot fully wrap our minds around it, God is Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit, individual yet one. So, we love the parent and the child, God the Father and God the Son.

The writers of both the scriptures read today agree that to love is tied to obeying God through love. Love of God, love of the Son, and love of those God loves. This love of others comes by extension that if you love Jesus who is God's Son then you will love all of God's children. Once again, there is no separating out who God loves. God may not love sin, but God loves every person. This commandment to love may feel or appear heavy and difficult still 1 John says this commandment to love is not burdensome. There is another scripture, Matthew 11:28-30 where Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

To love is not meant to be a burden, it is actually supposed to be life-giving. It is life-giving when we love as Jesus loved, with compassion, joy, hope, and grace. This kind of love is not demanding or arrogant or rude...you may be hearing more echoes of scripture in that (1Corinthians 13). The love of God, the love we strive to live into is the

kind of love that conquers the world, not in some domineering or dominating way, but in a way that affirms the amazing love of God and the value and worth of everyone, from your closest relationship to relationships in the broadest sense.

We are told to obey God's commandments. The commandments are to love God and love the children of God. We show that we love God by loving the people of God and we show we love the people of God by loving God. The two are inseparable. These commandments are meant to be life-giving; they are not meant to suck the life out of us. If our love comes from only ourselves to others, we will find loving difficult even burdensome, but when the love of God settles in us and from us flows out into the world, then loving ourselves and others become a gift.

This is the victory that the writer of 1 John is speaking. It is not that we have won a battle and smashed our opponents making them our subjects, less than us, we are conquerors and they the conquered. This is about a battle where all are upheld and honoured, where God's love abounds and transformed lives is the victory. We are victorious as Jesus was victorious over death. We believe in God through faith in Jesus and in that relationship we are given the power to love and to conquer the world not by force or coercion but by our love of God and love our of those God has created – God's children.

So if you haven't gotten the message yet, the command is simple and direct – love. Go into the world today with love outpoured, love for God and knowing God's love is for you and for all. Amen.