

John 14:15-31

Love in Action

Let's set the stage as you picture the story in your mind. There is a meal and people are gathered, but before the meal begins the host starts by removing his outer robe and ties a towel around himself. Then pours water into a basin and begins to wash the feet of those he is about to dine with. He wipes their feet with the towel. After doing that he says to those gathered you should do as I have done.

Together they eat a meal. It is a special time of the year. A special meal has been prepared and they partake of it with reverence but also, as any who would be gathered over a meal, the conversation is going on back and forth between the guests. Then, as can happen at a meal, the conversation boils over, a word is spoken that changes the trajectory and tone of the rest of the evening. There is an accusation of betrayal and then one person walks out. Now what?

It has already been an evening of unexpected actions, but so far, the actions were about showing others how to serve, how to love, but not this. The words of betrayal and knowing that something in the room has shifted cannot be ignored.

Now, for us, Easter has passed, and in case you didn't catch on, we already had this story a few weeks ago as we went through the days of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Why return to this scene, this story, so soon after Easter? The answer, this Thursday May 14th, the church worldwide celebrates what is known as Ascension Day and it is part of the whole Easter story. This story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection does not come to its fullness until Jesus ascends to once again be fully with God.

There are some Christian traditions in which the day is so important all work stops. It is a celebration day, just like Easter. Yet for so many of us the day, which comes forty days after Easter, and marks the day Jesus ascended to heaven as the disciples watched, well this day is most often overlooked. However, it is filled with significance for those who are followers of Christ.

As is written in one of my reference books, "Christ's ascension means that in heaven there is one who, knowing first hand the experience of suffering and temptation, prays for us and perfects our prayers. The ascension is a witness and guarantee of our own bodily resurrection, as well as an invitation for us to set our hearts and minds 'on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God' (Col. 3:1-2) to rule over all things in heaven and throughout the universe (Eph. 1:10, 20-23). Finally, the ascension of

Jesus serves as the prelude to Pentecost, when the power of the risen Christ came upon all believers through the Holy Spirit.”¹

I share all of this so that we come to this particular passage with the context needed to understand Jesus statement that was first read to us today, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”² This whole reading drops us into the conversation that took place over that Passover meal after Jesus had washed the disciples feet and after Judas walked out the door. Judas’ actions from that point on will trigger the events that lead to the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. And because we are reading this after the fact, we know that Jesus knows where all this will lead even as he joins those he loves for a final meal.

So Jesus starts into a conversation that they will not fully understand in the moment, but in the days after his death and resurrection, in those days of appearances, and later on when the promise and power of the Holy Spirit come to fruition, then they will begin to reflect on the events and remember these words spoken over a final meal. They will understand them in a new way. These words will give them courage and direction when confusion, grief, and fear are very real to them.

So rather than thinking of Jesus’ words read today as a stand alone, think of the words in the context of the whole Easter story. In fact, think of it in the context of Jesus life, a life where Jesus responded to needs, restored people to wholeness, and rejoiced with them. A life where Jesus loved using words and actions to make the point that God is love.

And if you were to look at this passage and underline the phrases or even just the word love, you would see just how important love is. It is central to all of this passage. It basically boils down to, loving Jesus means loving God and others. And loving Jesus is shown in how we love God and others.

And please do not confuse this kind of love, one that is shown in both word and deed, as what you need to do to be loved by God. God has always loved us first; it is why Jesus came into the world in the flesh and blood of a human being in the first place. It was God’s love that brought this about. Our actions of love are our response to God’s love. Our actions do not earn God’s love.

All of this is about love and how the relationship between God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and us is so intricately and beautifully woven together that it cannot be separated one from another. The word the Bible uses is abiding. You and I know God because God abides with us and is in us. Eugene Peterson writes clearly about this in *The Message*,

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“If you love me, show it by doing what I’ve told you. I will talk to the Father, and he’ll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can’t take him in because it doesn’t have eyes to see him, doesn’t know what to look for. But you know him already because he has been staying with you, and will even be *in* you!”³

If you love me, show it by doing what I’ve told you. Love is not just a feeling. Love is an action. Love is making the choice to let others know about this love that comes from God and we do this by loving others. Each time we speak words of love, compassion and grace should flow from us. We were taught in school about Newton’s laws of motion, that with each action comes a reaction, and not to get technical about it or push this thought too far, let’s just say that if our actions are actions of love, the reaction may also be that people feel loved and will share that love with others. The more pain and suffering one has felt the more difficult it may be for another to really trust that God loves them, has always loved them, and will always love them.

For those living in the harshest of conditions it may be near impossible for them to think that God abides in them and will be in them. It may take our example of compassion, grace, and love, for others to experience God’s love. Our love can change the trajectory of family history, the laws or ordinances that oversee our communities, and even the course of conflict in the world. Our love and compassion are demonstrated in the simple act of offering water to those who need it, or taking a census that shows where the areas of need are greatest when it comes to hospitals and schools being built, or the funding for health care and education and other civic priorities. How about paying attention to who you vote for, making sure your candidate has a political agenda that has a priority of care for the most vulnerable in our midst.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Do you remember what the greatest commandment was and what followed from that? In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus was asked, ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

When Jesus says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments, or show it by doing what I’ve told you, it is based in the command to love God and love you neighbour. When the passage from John you heard today is taken out of context it seems like judgement rather than love, but it is part of a whole discourse, what is known as Jesus’ farewell discourse, of things that Jesus wanted his disciples, his followers to know and understand about what it means to love and be loved.

³ [The Message](#) (MSG). Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

But Jesus does not expect us to be able to live this out on our own. Up until this point Jesus had been with his followers, but for them and for us, after the crucifixion, Jesus' resurrection and ascension, that would no longer be the case. At least not as it has been, which is why we are promised another Advocate to be with us forever. This is the Spirit of truth who abides with us and will be in us. We get the power and promise of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit that is hard to nail down or explain but is as real to our lived experience as anything else. The very breath of life, a comforter and counselor, a Spirit of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and so much more.

We are not orphaned, left with Jesus' words with no power to act on them. We have the Holy Spirit in and with us, blowing through the pews of this church and moving in the world. The Spirit is with us as we are moved to words of kindness and actions of love. As this particular scripture ends, "but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father", we do as Jesus commanded and love one another so that the world may know that we love the God. Remember the washing of feet? Of that act of kindness, humility, and love? This is what it means to do as Jesus has done and the kind of love Jesus spoke about.

So go and love. Go and love God and others through your words and your actions. Through your compassion and your decisions. Go out with love in your hearts and love on your minds for each and every person you encounter and for the world. For God so loved the world...Amen.