

Keeping Jesus
John 14:15-23
Preached by Rev. Dr. Harry Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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“Mom, if you really love me, you’ll let me spend the weekend in Ocean City with my friends.”

“Honey, if you really love me, you’ll let me buy that very cool motorcycle.”

“Son, if you love me you’ll stop this nonsense about being a musician and work with me in the family business.”

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my word...”

On the surface it seems Jesus is using the same blatant manipulation we use on each other. It’s a very effective strategy, “If you love me, if you really love me, you’ll do whatever I want.”

You may remember the two disciples John and his brother James pulled this same stunt on Jesus saying, “Lord, we want you to give us whatever we ask,” before demanding the highest possible positions in the new emerging Kingdom. You may also remember the times you did pretty much the same thing. You put conditions on others’ love for you implying if your conditions weren’t met the others professed love must be a sham.

Several Sundays back the sermon was based on the conversation between Jesus and Peter just after having breakfast on a beach. “Simon Peter, do you love me more than these?” Jesus asked three times. “Yes Lord, you know I love you,” Peter answered back three times. But the word for love Peter used was “brotherly love,” the love between two friends, instead of the agape or “perfect love” Jesus showed Peter.

So Jesus wasn’t manipulative or unreasonable when he said to the disciples, “Those who love me will keep my word,” he was just stating the obvious. Earlier he put it another way. “By their fruits you will know them,” in other words, the best way to measure whether or not someone is the real deal is to observe his lifestyle. Is it grounded in God’s love or not?

I believe the primary, ultimate goal for any Christian is to fall in love with Jesus. It’s not enough to agree with his teaching and put them into practice. More than that, for your own good, you need to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.” Jesus wants you, along with Peter, to answer “Yes” when he asks you, “Do you love me more than these,” knowing full well your love, like Peter’s, will fall short. But you’ve got to start somewhere!

I'll say it again, Christianity isn't all about rule keeping or believing the right doctrines, it is about accepting and returning God's love, trusting even though your love is incomplete and weak, God's love always takes up the slack.

Before I go on let's define the love God wants us to have for him. First of all, Jesus wasn't advocating an adolescent love that comes and goes with the wind. Instead he offers the mature and growing love that can only begin with the decision to commit.

Isn't that the basis for Christian marriage? Vows are taken to "love and honor for better or for worse, in sickness and in health as long as we both shall live," with the hope as the years pass the couple's love will grow far beyond what it was on their wedding day. You see your ability to love and be loved is a gift God gives you with the understanding you're now responsible for nurturing and growing it for the sake of other.

You know this to be true, any relationship enters the danger zone when one or both parties involved forget their commitments. Maybe they forget, true love shouldn't be based on how you feel but can only be based on your commitment to love. If you wake up each day deciding to love that's when love conquers all.

The same is true in your relationship with God. You may not feel any love for God at any given moment. All the more reason to make the decision every morning to put God first, pledging your love and then living up to your commitment.

Of course, making that decision and keeping it takes both prayer and meditation. A young inmate at the County Jail recently said something to me I found very profound, "My uncle told me prayer is talking to God and meditation is listening to God."

Prayer is telling God what you want, meditation is hearing what you need to hear. So quiet yourself and listen hard for that still small voice of affirmation and assurance that empowers you to make and keep your commitment to God.

Having said all that, let's go to today's gospel story which took place in the Upper Room only hours before the crucifixion as Jesus was preparing his disciples for what was to come.

"I will not leave you orphaned. In a little while you will no longer see me, but you will see me... On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you. They who keep my commandments are those who love me..."

Judas (not Iscariot) then asked, "Lord, how is it you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?"

That's when Jesus answered, "Those who love me will keep my word..."

That last phrase "keep my word" is essential to grasping this teaching. When we keep Jesus' word, we experience God's love because both Jesus and his Father make their home in us.

But what does "keep my word" mean? It doesn't simply mean believing in and doing the right things even though both are important. More than that "keeping my word" means embracing or keeping Jesus.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us...full of grace and truth."

So begins John's Gospel, opening with a vital piece of information, Jesus himself is God's Word. Everything about him, his personality, lifestyle, ability to love and forgive unconditionally, his ethics and disposition are all God's revelation of himself to the world. When you experience the Word you experience Jesus. When you experience Jesus, you experience God.

The great 20th century preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick preached a sermon entitled, "Christ Himself is Christianity." So keeping His word is really keeping Jesus at the heart of your life. Jesus is the personification of God's love at work in the world.

Listen again to what Jesus said about commitment making, maybe this time hearing it again for the first time.

"Those who love me will keep my word and my Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home in them."

Be clear about this when Jesus says, "You show you love me when you keep my word." Think of it not as a condition for his love, but a guarantee of his love. He loved you first so you could love him back. Another way of saying it, you can fall in love with Jesus because he already fell in love with you. As time passes, your love for Jesus can grow deeper and wider by keeping your commitment to love Jesus everyday as you give yourself to him everyday through prayer and meditation and living the new life serving others, especially the least of these, who can never pay you back. You see it's when you love and serve your neighbor for Jesus that once again the Word through you becomes flesh and lives among us.

"Mom, if you really love me, you'll let me spend the weekend with you."

"Honey, if you really love me, you'll let me wash the dishes and do my own laundry."

“Son, if you really love me, you’ll let me help you realize your dreams.”
Jesus said, “If you love me you will keep my Word.”

Isn’t it time to take your friendship with God to the next level, to fall deeper in love with Jesus? Make time for him everyday several times a day. Search the scriptures, not just for information, but for inspiration. Keep Jesus close so you can grow closer, and then be prepared to love Jesus whenever he comes to you in the guise of anyone who needs to be loved as only Jesus can.