

John 14:15-21

“*If you love Me,*” says Jesus, “*you will keep My commandments.*” Is this the same thing as a wife telling her husband, “If you love me, dear, you will do all the chores I posted on the refrigerator door!” And her poor husband, who was planning on enjoying a round of golf that day, in order to prove to his wife his love for her, instead begins doing each and every chore until they are all checked off the list. Is Jesus like a demanding spouse? “If you love Me, you will obey Me!” This is how many see it - those outside the church, and many within the church. And so living a Christian life can seem like wearing a heavy yoke or burden.

But no, Jesus is not a demanding spouse. He is not a new law-giver; a new Moses giving us rule after rule to obey. Jesus’ commandments are not burdensome. He does not impose upon us; He frees us. He liberates us by keeping all of God’s commandments for us.

The chores Jesus puts on our refrigerator door have to do with love and faithfulness...loving His words to us and being faithful. Jesus’ commandments are not the Ten Commandments. God gave these through Moses. But through Jesus God gives us grace and truth. He gives us Baptism and the Sacrament. He gives us joy, life, and hope. He gives us forgiveness.

What if that spouse were to tell her husband, “If you love me, then come here so I can embrace you.” “If you love me, you will be faithful to me, and I to you.” Is that a demanding spouse? Just the opposite.

Now this command she would not give to just any man, but only to her husband. And so with Jesus. He does not say, “*If you love Me...*” to the world, for the world does not love Him, nor can it love Him. The world, therefore, is unable to keep His commandments. It would be useless to command the world to be faithful to Jesus, for there can be no faithfulness unless there is love. This is why Jesus asked Peter three times, “*Do you love Me?*” Peter could not be a faithful shepherd of Jesus’ sheep unless he loved Jesus.

“*If you love Me...*” Jesus speaks these words to you. For in Holy Baptism He became your divine spouse. He called you out of the world to Himself. Not to the world, but to you He says, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*”

That word *keep* in the Greek means more than just to obey. It means to guard and treasure. We guard those things which have great value to us. We guard our money, our home, our vehicles; we guard ourselves and our families. Where in this list of things that we guard does Jesus fit in? Do we guard His commandments? Do we put a high value on His words to us? Do we, or don’t we, come eagerly to hear Jesus’ words preached to us? Do we desire to read and study His words? Are we faithful to Jesus by receiving His Sacrament often? This is one of Jesus’ commandments to us: “*Do this...*” He says. This commandment is not for the world. His meal of grace is not for them, but it is for you, for He has become your spouse.

Jesus’ commandment that we come to His Sacrament is just like the spouse commanding her husband to come and embrace her. This command is not a burden. This is a command of love and faithfulness. Jesus’ commandment that we hear His words to us is just like the spouse desiring to engage with her husband in joyful conversation. Would her husband turn away from her and refuse to listen to her? Not if he truly loves her.

The world does not love Jesus, and so it does not desire to hear His words. His words are joy, peace, love, and hope. They are words of grace...of mercy. But the world refuses Jesus’ words for there is no love for Him in the world.

You are not of the world, nor am I. And yet we act like the world at times. Has our love for Jesus grown cold? Are we heading for a divorce with our Lord? If you treated your spouse the way you treat Jesus and His words to you, how long would your marriage last? This question you and I ought to consider.

Jesus knows how utterly sinful we are. He sees the lack of love for His commandments in our heart. For this reason He says, *“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper.”* This word *Helper* is best translated *Comforter*. And this Comforter is the Holy Spirit.

God wants you to see Him not as a terrible God who punishes, but as your loving God who comforts you. He is the spouse who comes to embrace her husband even though he has been unfaithful to her. He comes to speak words of love to us; words of forgiveness, even though we have often ignored Jesus' words in the past.

The world does not need a comforter, for it is not smitten in its heart. The world lives smugly, without fear. It does not care about God's wrath or His grace. It is content to live without a comforter, for it sees no need for one.

This is not to be you and me. Because we love Jesus, we are sickened in our heart that we have offended Him. We are not the faithful spouse to Him that we should be. We have lack of love for Jesus' commandments in our heart more than we have love for them. We are the ones, therefore, who need a comforter.

God calls Himself a comforter because it is impossible for anyone to be afraid of a comforter. A comforter comforts. God gives you the Holy Spirit to comfort your heart. *“Be unafraid,”* He tells you, *“for you are baptized, and you believe in Jesus. Do not be anxious, therefore, about your relation to God. He sent Jesus to suffer your punishment on the cross. He put out the fires of hell for you. Be comforted and full of courage and hope. God forgives your sin.”*

Friend, God wants to be your comforter. He does not want you to live even one day doubting His love for you; uncertain of whether His mercy includes you. You do love Jesus. This is why you desire to guard and treasure His gifts to you. Sometimes you fail, and fail miserably in this, as do I. But to you God says, *“I forgive you.”* And His Comforter, the Holy Spirit, will help you to love Jesus' commandments because He lives in your heart.

In four days the church celebrates Jesus' ascension into heaven. Because He ascended, we cannot see Him here with us, even though He is here in spirit, flesh and blood. When Jesus walked the earth, He often came to His disciples to comfort them. But after His ascension, He could no longer do that. This is why He asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit. Your faith, your love for Jesus, your works of love for others - all this is because the Holy Spirit dwells in you. Without Him, we would live in fear of God. But with Him in us, we know in whom we believe, and our hearts are full of assurance. This is because the Holy Spirit is constantly declaring Jesus to you. He loves nothing more than to comfort you with Jesus' gifts.

We have certain foods that we eat which we treasure. We call this kind of food *comfort food*. Here on the altar is true comfort food. It is the meal of Christ Himself for you. And the Holy Spirit leads you here faithfully so that your divine spouse may here embrace you, forgive you, and give you every gift of life and salvation.

As we come forward, we hear Jesus saying, *“If you love Me...”* Of course we love Him! This is why we come forward...to embrace Him who embraced us from a cross with His love. Amen.