

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” Fourteen. That’s the number of times we heard the word “love” today in our Epistle and Gospel readings. In 1 John 5, five times. In John 15, nine times. That’s a lot of love. And how fitting for Mother’s Day, right? Moms are receiving cards today with hearts inside, and signed with the words, “I love you.” We cannot see inside each other’s hearts. Not even our own. So, a card is a nice way of expressing the love that is in our heart.

Here is another way...be respectful to mom. Honor her. And do what she tells you to do. Because here is the honest truth, to obey is to love. It’s this way with God, too. The apostle John writes in our Epistle, “*This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.*” And Jesus says in our text, “*If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love.*”

We like to draw hearts as a symbol of our love. But perhaps we should draw hands and feet instead, and even lips. Because we do not love with our hearts. We love each other, and we love God, by using our mouths, our hands and feet, to obey that which is commanded of us.

But we do not much care for the word obey, do we? Not as much as we like the word love. Yet even our Lord obeyed. He obeyed His Father because He loved Him. “*I have kept My Father’s commandments,*” He says, “*and abide in His love.*”

Whom do you obey? The one you obey is the one you love. The world does not love God. This is obvious because the world tramples underfoot the commandments of God.

What about us? Do you love God? Do I? I cannot see into your heart, nor can you see into mine. But we can see each other’s hands and feet, and we can hear the words that come from each other’s mouths. Are our mouths, hands, and feet obedient to that which God commands? Not so much, right? It is pretty apparent that we love ourselves much more than we love God because we do what pleases us much more than what pleases God. Go and learn well the Ten Commandments, and you will see what pleases God; how we are to obey Him.

Jesus kept them. He never disobeyed His Father because He loves His Father perfectly. But there is one commandment the Father gave to His Son that He did not give to us. And that commandment was to lay down His life on the cross for all of us who do nothing but disobey.

This commandment, too, Jesus obeyed. See His hands and feet? There is the evidence that He loved His Father. And there is the evidence that He loved you. For there in His hands and feet are the marks of the nails. Jesus loved you more than He loved Himself. He put your needs ahead of His own. He gave Himself up for you, for all of you. “*Greater love,*” He says, “*has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*” Yet Jesus died for us when we were His enemies. When we were disobedient sinners, Christ died for us.

How’s that for love? It’s powerful and it’s real. Not, “I’ll love you if you love me in return; if you do something for me.” That’s not love. That’s more how we love. A what’s-in-it-for-me type of love.

Let me use a true story to describe Jesus' love for you. A woman had a husband who suffered a terrible accident while at work. He was crushed by heavy pipes. In a coma for six months, and in the hospital for many months after that, when he came home, all he could do was lie in bed, barely able even to speak. His wife cared for him day after day. But when he could speak, he told her to go away; to divorce him and forget about him. He did not want to be such a burden for her the rest of his life. He wanted her to find someone else to be with who could show love to her. She refused to leave him. He was the man God gave to her. And she had committed herself to him alone "in sickness and in health, for better or for worse." Although he could not use his hands and feet to love her, she used her hands and feet to love him until the day he died.

My friends, Jesus does not love you because of what you can do for Him. Look at Waylon. He cannot use his hands and feet, nor his mouth to show love for Jesus. Yet look at how Jesus loves him. Washing his sins away, bringing him into His family today through Holy Baptism. In time, as he learns more and more of Jesus and His love, Waylon will use his hands and feet to love Jesus.

And isn't that you right now? You are not here for any other reason than this, that you love Jesus, right? It's why your feet carry you to His house. It's why your hands write a check to place into His offering plate. It's why your mouth sings His praises. You are able to use your mouth, hands, and feet to show your love for Jesus and for others. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we know that we are so very lacking in such love.

Do not be afraid. Think of that wife who loved her husband day in and day out. All he could do was to live in her love for him. And this is what Jesus means when He says, "*Abide in My love.*" We cannot abide in our love. We do not have enough love with which to abide. But Jesus does. To abide in Jesus' love means to admit the truth that our love is not what it should be; that we are sinful and not obedient. But abiding in Jesus' love also means to believe and rejoice in His love for us; to see ourselves as that husband who was helpless yet was being cared for by the one who loved him.

Jesus is the one who loves you, my friend. And He is the one who forgives you for your lack of love. He does not forgive you if you are obedient to Him. He forgives you. Each and everyone of you He forgives. And this is why you want to obey Him.

"*Abide in My love.*" This is no stern command. It is pure invitation. And it is for everyone of you because Jesus loves everyone of you. Amen.