

John 14:15-21

“If you love me...” No husband or wife enjoys hearing these words from their spouse, because they know they’re about to be blackmailed into doing something that they really do not want to do. “If you love me...you’ll go with me next week to visit my mother.” “If you love me...you’ll stop smoking.” “If you love me...(fill in the blank)” Such statements can be relationship-killers. Perhaps the other spouse could turn around and respond, “If you love me, you’ll stop making such demands of me!”

And so it may surprise us to hear Jesus say these words in our text for today, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*” We may feel like Peter when Jesus asked him three times, “*Simon...do you love Me?*” and Peter replied, “*Yes, Lord...You know that I love you.*” Jesus did not need to know if Peter loved Him. He already knew. And He knows those who love Him today. It is not for His benefit that He says, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*” It’s for ours. And it’s not blackmail. It’s not Jesus way of getting us to obey what He has commanded. He speaks these words out of love for us.

On the surface it seems like Jesus is saying that those who truly love Him, love God, will obey the Ten Commandments. But the word “keep” here is not the word to obey in the Greek. It really means to guard or to treasure, to hold on to. Does Jesus want us to treasure the Ten Commandments? Is He saying that those who guard within their heart the laws and commands of God are, in fact, the ones who truly love Him? If this were the case, then it would be plain to us that none of us really loves Jesus all that much. We say we do. But when the test of our love is how well we keep and treasure what God has commanded, our actions speak louder than our words.

What exactly has Jesus commanded? “*The Law came through Moses,*” says John chapter 1, “*But grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*” Jesus did not come to be a new Law-Giver. In fact, He kept the Law for everyone who breaks the Law. Jesus commanded the evil spirits and they were forced to obey Him. He commanded the wind and the waves, and they did as well. Is this how He commands us? Perhaps these words of command from His mouth will help us to understand: “*Come unto Me,*” He says, “*all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” Jesus’ commandments are not more rules to add to your already too-heavy burden. His commandment is to let Him carry your burden for you. God commanded His Son to come and fulfill the Law for us, because all of us stand condemned by it. You do not prove your love for God by how well you obey Him. It’s the other way around. Jesus proves His love for you by obeying His Father in all things, by coming to rescue you from the curse of the Law.

“*If you love Me...*” says Jesus. It might be easier for us to understand His words this way: “It’s because you love Me, that you guard and treasure My commandments.” You do not have to command a new mother to guard and treasure her tiny baby. She does it automatically. Some of you saw the video a few weeks ago of a cat jumping into action and driving off a dog that was attacking a young boy. Even animals guard and treasure those who love them and take care of them. And so why wouldn’t we who are Christians guard in our hearts, and treasure above all, the words of Jesus, His promises, His invitation to find in Him rest for our weary soul?

We do guard and treasure what He has commanded because we love Him. The world does not love God. God even says so in the Epistle of St. John. This is why the world--all who are of the world, and not of God--do not guard and treasure the words and promises of Jesus. Those who are of the world may obey the Ten Commandments on the outside, just as the wind and the waves obeyed Jesus. But

they do not keep the commandments of Jesus by coming to Him for rest, for life, for forgiveness, and salvation, because they do not love Him in their hearts.

You do. You love Jesus in your heart. This is why you keep His commandments. This is why you guard His words. This is why you treasure His Sacraments. Not everyone does. But you do because God has poured His love into your heart. The amazing thing about God is that He loves and cherishes us; He treasures and keeps us not because we love Him, but because we are sinners who break His Law. Just like the dog in the video was assaulting the little boy, so we are assaulted by evil, by the devil and our own sinfulness. But Jesus jumped into action. He drove the devil away from you in your baptism. And He comes to you and heals your wounds with His soothing words. He restores you with His Sacrament.

It's not that you and I are deserving of this. We are rebellious. We go our own way in life. We turn our back on God and His love. But this is what mercy is all about. God loved us when we were His enemies. Christ died for the ungodly. God forgives you, and not because you love Him; not because you guard and keep what He has commanded. Your Savior jumped into the dog's mouth to rescue you. Jesus stepped into the jaws of hell for you. This is why you are forgiven. And this is why you love God. And this is why you guard and treasure what He has commanded.

Since we are forgiven, does this mean that we can ignore the Ten Commandments? Think about that cat who rescued the boy in the video. After being rescued, would that boy, along with his family, despise the cat and treat it with contempt? Of course not! That cat was even honored last week by throwing out the first pitch at a baseball game. I doubt if the cat threw the ball well, but the point is that the cat was being honored. Jesus has rescued us, not from some dog, but from eternal death in hell. How can we, now, dishonor Him with our life? How can we want to treat Him with contempt by purposely ignoring the Ten Commandments and living, instead, for ourself? This is not the way of Christians. You are forgiven. Jesus bore your entire burden for you on the cross. As you have received God's free mercy in Christ Jesus, let us now live in that mercy, showing ourselves to be sons and daughters of our gracious and forgiving God. Amen.