

“The Advocate”
 May 21, 2017
 Text: John 14:15-21

Island Heights UMC, Island Heights, NJ
 Sixth Sunday of Easter

Keeping the Commandments

Love. As the good old song reminds us, “All you need is love.” It’s easy.

“If you love me,” Jesus says to followers, *“you will keep my commandments.”*

Yes, we certainly know the Ten Commandments. But with Jesus comes the greatest commandment, which is to love God with all our heart and all our soul, and with all our mind and all our strength. And his second command is like it: To love our neighbors like ourselves.

This is the ministry of Jesus. It was all so plain to his disciples. Still is. These commandments are so simple a child can understand them. And yet, left on our own, we just cannot keep these commandments.

The Third Person of the Trinity

Jesus gets it. Jesus understands this oh so well in his own experience among humanity. How many times would his own heart be broken as he sees the abuse of many at the hands of others. How well he knows the condition of mankind as he witness the developing case against him and his ministry. How much of all of humanity’s sins are confirmed when he is put on a cross. Because not all are able to see who he is and where he comes from. But knowing he will return to the Father his concern is, as always, for his people—a people who, by nature, are prone to sin and have no ability on their own to fix the problem. And when his heart is affected by this, Jesus is a man on the move:

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”

So, there is this One called the Advocate, the “Spirit of truth,” Jesus says. It’s The Holy Spirit; the third person of the Trinity. Eternal and of the same substance as the Father and the Son, this is the promised one from Jesus; being sent to come along side, guide, and remain with us.

In Greek, the word is *parakletos*. Translated, it means the Advocate—as in counselor, someone to speak for us, as if in a courtroom when we are facing a serious charge. Your advocate will know far better what to do and what to say on your behalf than you, lest you get in more trouble.

Of course, we arrive once again at the mystery of the Trinity, and we wrestle anew with the idea of three-in-one; one God in three distinct persons. And here Jesus, a member of the Trinity himself, is making a promise that involves the never-ending activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Spirit is one the ordinary world of perception does not see or can even know.

“But you know him,” Jesus says, *“because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”* Note that. That’s a direct promise from Jesus. And it’s far better than being alone.

The Rescue

Are there any who know what it is to be alone? What if we were alone in this life? Abandoned. The fear of abandonment grows deep roots. To be left on own. Who knows the pain experienced by a young kid who has been neglected? How frightened is the mind of a child orphaned by war? To be left with no parents, which means no support, no guidance, no love. You may remember the stark black and white movie *Schindler's List*. The only time any color is seen in this film is the red coat of a little girl who is aimlessly walking the streets as a Jewish Ghetto is being liquidated and people are being randomly executed all around her. Oscar Schindler watches in horror from a distance as she just keeps walking between the bodies. It may take a lifetime to recover from the traumatic damage of being orphaned.

To be spiritually orphaned also does damage—damage at a different level. The fear of being closed out of eternity haunts us. The hopelessness that consumes us with the fear of there being no God to turn to, the darkness that descends when we're cut off from the Divine; this is the horror show hell must be when we enter into eternal separation from God.

But thank God, God sent his only Son, and when Jesus gets to our spiritual orphanage and his compassionate heart is moved by what he sees, he makes a vow:

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you,"

Pentecost Sunday is coming in just a couple of weeks. It marks and remembers the day when the Holy Spirit enters the place where the disciples of Jesus have been told to wait for the power from on high. Jesus says,

"In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

We will not be left on our own. The good news is that there is a rescue operation underway and it's Jesus who is on the move.

The Completion of Community

And it's all for the sake of love, and for the sake of community. A community is the special connection forged between all its members through love, in which no one is left out. There is a circle drawn around the group that expands ever wider and prefers inclusion over exclusion. Exclusion happens when we intentionally or unintentionally keep others out. The other way of exclusion from community is by the removal of one's self. When trials come, or when shame cripples, or when grudges take hold; these are times we isolate and take ourselves out the circle of community. Community will be restored when we forgive. Forgive others and forgive ourselves.

The Trinity is our model for community. Jesus is making moves that are completing the circle of oneness. He is going to the Father to ask for the Spirit. There is connection between Father and Son; and between Jesus and his followers; and between his followers and the Father; all these moves are pulsating in the power of the Holy Spirit; the Advocate. Jesus says,

"They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and

those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

It is in this mystic connection that community finds its completion and enduring source, which is love.

Our Mission

So, for our mission, and for our very lives, we can take three specific actions and make them a normal part of who we are. 1) Ask for the Holy Spirit, 2) keep the commandments of love, and 3) live in community.

In *all* we do and *all* we are as followers of the way of Jesus Christ, we live at *all* times with the need of the Holy Spirit to enter our circumstances and guide us through each experience. This is true as individuals and as a community. When we worship, or when we go about our daily routine, when we go through difficult times, or when we celebrate good times, we go out in mission, or when we are on the receiving end, it is always good to ask for the Holy Spirit, knowing that Jesus himself is asking God to send that same Spirit to us.

How will we recognize the Spirit? *It's easy.* We will know the Advocate is operating in our midst when signs of love arise; love for God, and love for our neighbors. We keep the commandments of love close in our heart so they inform our daily activity. Easier said than done, of course, and even impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit, which is why we continue to ask for the Spirit of God to be with us.

Ask for the Holy Spirit, and keep the commandments of love. And as these commandments of love are kept, we find ourselves living in community. We begin to see others as no different than us. We dare to live in another's shoes to understand them, and then surrender our own selves for the sake of their well-being. It's then we are following the teachings of Jesus. We cross barriers and connect in ways that reflect the community of the Trinity; the love we extend comes out of the love that exist between the Father and the Son and finds its way to us in the power of the Holy Spirit. This way the circle is completing, and we are connecting with the Divine and each other for all time. Amen.