

SERMON FOR SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2020

Easter 6A 2020 John 14:15-21 “The Lord and Giver of Life”

Dear fellow redeemed of the risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in today’s Gospel lesson we heard Jesus say: ***If you love me, you will keep my commandments.***

Let’s start by pointing out that Jesus’ statement is not a command to us, telling us that is what we ought to do as Christians. It is rather a description of reality. ***Jesus is teaching that love shapes who we are and what we do.***

Agape love is a verb, an action. It’s not lazy, and it doesn’t discriminate. If we could love perfectly, our entire life would consist of doing His commandments. How so? Because the commandments are actually a description of perfect love.

The first three commandments, tell us of perfect love toward God – what it means **to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**

And commandments 4-10, tell us of perfect love toward our neighbor – what it means to **love your neighbor as yourself.**

And so, if we could love perfectly, we’d fulfill the all the commandments, for they are a description of the Christian life.

The question for us today is: are they a description of your life? If we are honest, the answer is **no**.

If we are honest, then we mean what we say when we confess our sins:

Most merciful God . . . we have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

Because of deadly, ongoing effects of original sin, perfectly living the commandments is beyond our reach. Indeed, we’ve failed miserably at keeping the commandments.

This is the difficulty Luther found himself in. He said that despite his most diligent efforts he found himself **“bound in Satan’s chains,”** and **“suffered the pangs of hell.”**

He tried his hardest to do what God commanded! But he couldn’t. Neither can we.

So where does that leave us? Well, ironically, that leaves us ***right where we need to be!***

For you see, acknowledging our sin and inability and failure ***is the first step*** in living the Christian life. To see the commandments as an unattainable standard, is to receive them exactly as God intended!

God’s Law was ***never meant*** to be a life-giving path we could follow and thus earn salvation.

Rather, the commandments were given as a way to show us our sin; to show us our need; to show us our failure; to show us our *lack* of love and life;

to show us that of our own power, exertions and conviction, we cannot live this Christian life, no matter **how hard** we try.

When we acknowledge that truth, we are right where God wants us to be. Once we are enabled to admit that we are dead in our trespasses and sins, **then God gives us life.**

True life. **The Christian life.**

That's the key point for you to understand today—the Christian life is not something that we are able to do, but that it is, in fact, **a gracious gift from God. PAUSE**

That insight was crucial for Luther. His awful, heavy burden of trying to living God's commands perfectly, was lifted by this good news – **that the Christian life was not what he did, but what God was doing for him!** It was a gift of God's grace.

And so, in today's Gospel lesson, Jesus tells His disciples **where** this life comes from, when He says to them: **Because I live, you also will live.**

In other words, our life is grounded in His life. As Jesus said elsewhere, **"I am the vine, you are the branches, apart from Him we can do nothing.** Apart from Him, we have no real life, only the illusion of life, we cannot love, for we're turned in upon ourselves.

The Good News for us this morning is that because He lives, we live. Because He died and rose again, we who are born without life or the ability to love, also rise to a new life in Him.

And so, **gifted** with life by Jesus and being found in Jesus, we then begin to live and love as He lived and loved.

Jesus also tells His disciples how this new, Christian life begins. And note, it is not from anything they do, but rather from what He will do: **I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, He dwells with you and will be in you.**

And note that Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "Another" Helper. Who was the first Helper? Jesus Himself.

The Son of God become man, to take our sins, die with them on the cross, and rise to life again.

This work of Jesus conquering our sin, our death, and our enemy the devil, **earned** for us the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of new and eternal life. And this new life is what we are celebrating this whole Easter season.

Yet, even though **Jesus earned** this gift for us, **that is not enough** – if it is not also **a gift given** to us.

Just as a Christmas gift purchased and wrapped, but then never taken out of the closet and put under the tree is incomplete – so too with the salvation and redemption earned by Jesus on the cross. It must also be given to us.

And so, Jesus says, I will send *another* Helper. One who will join you to me.

One who will give what to you what I have earned for you. This One, the Holy Spirit, who will be, as we confess in the Creed, **the Lord and giver of life**.

The Holy Spirit is Lord, for He is God Himself. And He is the giver of the life that Jesus won and accomplished for us in His death and resurrection.

And on the Day of Pentecost, these words of Jesus came true, as He sent the Holy Spirit to His Church.

And this gift of God has been given to you. In Baptism, the Holy Spirit gives joins you to Jesus' death and resurrection and gives you **a new life, a Christ life, a Christian life**.

And the Holy Spirit given to you in the gift of Holy Communion, where by eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus, He strengthens and keeps you in **this new life, Christ life, Christian life**.

Since God is the great giver of all good things, the Holy Spirit is not a gift given once, and then we are left on our own to live and sustain this new, Christian life.

No! As we considered at the beginning of this sermon, we do not keep the commandments. They do not describe our life. We fall and we fail, you know it and I know it.

And so, like Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the gift that *keeps on giving*. He keeps giving forgiveness. He keeps giving life.

He keeps pointing us to Christ. He keeps delivering to us the blessings Christ won for us.

He is not here today and gone tomorrow, but as Jesus said, the Holy Spirit **dwells with you and will be in you**.

Jesus does **not leave us as orphans**. He comes to us, and His Spirit comes to us, and through them the Father too lives in us. And then we have life, **new life, Christ life, Christian life**.

And this is the life that we are now privileged to live. It is not a life of perfection, or of ever-increasing holiness – as if we have something to be proud of!

Our sinful urges still get the best of us, tempting us to want to live **the High Life instead of the Christ life!**

And so, living the Christ life is not about our **achieving** perfection or holiness— but about us by grace through faith **receiving** Christ's holiness and perfection.

The Christ life is a life begun, continued, and ended in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

A life of daily dying in repentance and confession, and being raised to a *new life* in the forgiveness of our sins.

For in Christ, as Scriptures say, we **live and move and have our being**.

The Holy Spirit breathes His life-giving Word into us, and receiving life from Him, the life and love of Christ, you will begin to keep His commandments, although imperfectly.

In the Spirit's power, you'll begin loving, and serving, and sacrificing and going out of your way for others. ***Not because you have to, but because you love as God first loved you.***

And you'll begin to love, not to merit any favor before God – for God has already given you all that He is and all that He has.

He has already given His Son to die on the cross for you, and His Spirit to dwell in you, and the promise of eternal life in His Kingdom – what more could He give?

No, you will begin to love and to serve others because you are a child of God, who, in the Spirit's power, are living His life, a new life, a Christ life.

In the Collect for today, we prayed that the Lord would teach us “**rightly to pray.**” And so, our Lord has.

And that we might live the life that He has given us, He has taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer ***Thy kingdom come.***

With these words ***we are not*** just praying that God's kingdom would come at the end of time, but that it would come specifically to us, here and now.

His kingdom of grace and love and forgiveness in His Son.

And how does this Kingdom of God come here and now? The Small Catechism echoes the words Jesus spoke here: ***God's kingdom comes when our Heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace, we believe His Holy Word and lead godly lives, here in time and there in eternity.***

God's Kingdom comes when we are gifted with the Holy Spirit. That's how it all begins, and ends. **The Spirit of truth** leads us into the truth of God's Word, and we believe.

The Spirit of life gives us the life of God, and we live.

And this life, this new life of forgiveness, this Christ life, we live not only here in time, but also in eternity.

Because He lives, we also will live. And that's not a command – that's a promise! In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**