

Order of Worship
Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 17, 2020

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship: *Sanctuary (TFWS 2164)*
Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true.
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

Opening Prayer:

Hear our prayers, O God, as we come to sing your praises. Bless us with your steadfast love, in times of peace and in times of trial. Make your presence known to us this day, for we seek to know you better. Enliven us with your Spirit of truth, and increase our faith, even as we place our hope and trust in you. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith Apostles' Creed

Prayer:

Ever present God, in this time of pandemic when many are feeling alone, isolated and orphaned, let us remember your words. You will not leave us orphaned. You will not leave us alone. You will not leave us isolated. You send us the paraclete - comforter, advocate, counselor, companion - all these and more. Remind us of the truth; as we abide in you, you abide in us and as you abide in all of us, we abide in you together. We are not orphaned, alone and isolated. You are with us and we remain connected through your Spirit. This we know in the name of Jesus the Christ who gave us this assurance and taught us to pray.

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word
O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

New Testament Reading Acts 17: 22-31

Psalm 66

Epistle Reading 1 Peter 3: 13-22

Special Music

Gospel Reading John 14:15-21

Sermon Keeping the Commandments. Why?

Hymn *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (UMH 384)*

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down;
fix in us thy humble dwelling;
all thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.

2. Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast!
Let us all in thee inherit;
let us find that second rest.
Take away our bent to sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

3. Come, Almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

4. Finish, then, thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee;
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Benediction:

Go forth, knowing that we are not ever alone, for the love of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit abides
in us all. Amen

Response *God Be With You till We Meet Again*

God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Keeping the Commandments, Why?

5/17/2020

John 14: 15-21

I believe that I can safely say that most, if not all, of us listening to this sermon would consider ourselves to be law abiding citizens. Oh, we may have had some minor traffic violation at some point. There might have been some indiscretion as a teenager. But all in all, we have abided by the laws of the land, even those we may not have liked. Most of you children hearing this I trust abide by the rules when you are at school. We play by the rules when playing a game. We tend to follow instructions. We keep commandments. It is what we do as Christians. We keep God's commandments.

Why do we keep commandments? Why do we follow the law? Why do we wait at a stoplight when there is not another car in sight? Probably most of us would say that it is just ingrained in us to follow the law, to play by the rules, to follow instructions and especially to keep God's commandments.

Some would say that we keep commandments to avoid punishment. We drive the speed limit so we don't get a ticket and have to pay a fine. We don't kill our spouse or children because we don't want to go to jail or the electric chair. We obey the teacher because we don't want to have to stay in at recess and write "I will not _____" 500 times on the chalkboard. We obey our parents because we don't want to experience whatever punishment they had, which in my case was the "John, I am so disappointed, I thought I raised you better than that."

We obey the commands of God so we may avoid the fires of hell and eternal damnation. We want to avoid those Medieval images of roasting in a hot cauldron of fire while the devil licks his chops, poking us with his fork until we are done, which we never are.

Is that why we keep God's commandment? Or do we keep God's commandment in order to receive reward?

We follow the instructions at work so that we get our paycheck and hopefully, if we do our job well, get a raise. We obey the speed limit and other traffic laws so we may get a discount on our insurance. We obey the teacher so we may get a sticker, star or whatever reward they may give. We obey our parents so they feed us well, let us play longer and maybe even take us to Disney World whenever this virus goes away.

We obey God's commands so that we may receive our heavenly reward. We receive our halos, wings and harp and sit on our cloud. We enter into God's presence and we stand around the throne praising God 24/7. We want to spend eternity in the divine presence, not the fires of hell.

So, we keep God's commandments to receive reward and avoid punishment.

But if we keep God's commandment simply to avoid punishment, we hold to the logic that God desires to punish us for not keeping commandments. We hold the image of God being the wrathful God who punishes us for not obeying. God is the taskmaster with the whip ready to crack it over anyone who steps out of line.

But that denies the very nature of God, who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..." (Exodus 34: 6-7a).

If we keep God's command simply to obtain a heavenly reward, we play into the belief of "works righteousness". We can earn God's favor by our good works. Our salvation is through our works.

But that denies God's grace. It implies that salvation is something that must be earned, not the gracious gift of God. If that is the case then there is going to be a lot of room in heaven, for very few, if any, can do enough to earn God's abundant grace. I probably wouldn't be there.

So, we don't keep God's commandments to avoid punishment. We don't keep God's commandment in order to earn a reward (because the reward is so great that there is nothing we could possibly do to earn it). Why do we keep God's commandments? If our motivation is not to avoid punishment or receive reward, what is our motivation for following God's commandments?

"They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me." (21) "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (15)

Jesus spells it out pretty clearly. We keep his commandments, which are God's commandments, because we love him. Our motivation to keep God's commandments (I want to clarify that in this context the word commandment is not an order that must be obeyed or else, like a military order, but has more the connotation of instructions or teachings) is out of our love for God. We show our love for Jesus and therefore God by keeping and following the command that Jesus has given.

What is that command that we are to keep because we love Jesus? Do we keep all 613 Levitical Laws? I hope not because I sure won't be showing that I love Jesus when I chow down on some shrimp, barbeque, or a bacon cheeseburger. No, it is not that we keep all 613 Levitical Laws.

Well, it must be that we keep the Holiness Codes, Leviticus 18-26. That was the code for the Israelites as they entered into the promised land to set them apart for the other people of the land, but that was not the command that Jesus gave to keep in order to show our love for Jesus.

Well it has to be the big 10, the Ten Commandments. And yes, while these are the commands God gave to Moses to instruct us on how to relate to God and to each other, it is not the command that Jesus gave that he wants the disciples to follow to show that they love him.

We find the command Jesus wants us to keep to show that we love him back in Chapter 13. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another (34)”.

We are to keep the command to love as Jesus loved.

Jesus loved by serving. He washed the feet of the disciples, taking the role of servant instead of master. We keep the command to love by serving, especially those who are in need and may be below us in status.

Jesus loved by giving mercy. To the woman who committed adultery that was brought to him for condemnation, he gave mercy instead of judgement and condemnation. We keep the command to love by giving mercy instead of judgement and condemnation.

Jesus loved by giving people what they needed. He fed the hungry. Not only those who were physically hungry like the 5000 but also the spiritually hungry like the Samaritan woman at the well. We keep the command to love by feeding others physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Jesus loved by making people whole, by showing others the complete love that the Father has for them. We keep the command to love as we bring others to know the complete healing love that God has for them and us.

Most of all Jesus loved by laying aside his life for others. He put aside any selfish or self-centered wants, including his life, to do the will of the Father for the salvation of the world. He put aside his will to do the will of the Father. We keep the command to love as we put aside our self-interest in order to do the will of the Father.

We cannot keep the command to love in order to avoid punishment, for avoiding punishment focuses on ourselves and therefore does not show love. Likewise, we cannot keep the command to love in order to receive a reward, for that also focuses on ourselves and does not show love. We can only keep the command to love as we love others as God has loved us.

In this time where it can be so easy to focus on ourselves and on our needs, let us demonstrate our love for Jesus by giving love to others, putting aside our self-interest for the interest of others and to do the will of the Father. In this time, we need more than ever to keep the command to love as Jesus loved, the divine love that excels above all other loves.