

Sermon for Sunday, May 22, 2022 (Easter Six)
John 14:23-29

Loving Jesus

I invite you to sing a song with me. Jenny, do you have a pitch? [Sing verse 1 of “Jesus Loves Me.”]

*Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong. They are weak but He is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.*

I would guess that most if not all of us learned that song as little children. It’s been included in our last two hymnals, and there’s a reason for that. It may be the most important song in all of Christian hymnody.

And here is perhaps the second most important song [VT 133]. Let’s sing the first two verses together.

*My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine
For thee all the follies of sin I resign.
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art thou.
If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, ‘tis now.*

*I love thee, because thou hast first loved me,
And purchased my pardon on Calvary’s tree.
I love thee for wearing the thorns on thy brow.
If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, ‘tis now.*

*In mansions of glory and endless delight
I’ll ever adore thee in heaven so bright.
I’ll sing with the glittering crown on my brow.
If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, ‘tis now.*

The second verse especially answers the question as to why we should love Jesus. Simply put, because he first loved us.

But one question this hymn doesn’t answer is, what does it mean to love Jesus? Is it simply a feeling we have? Is it nothing more than words we say (or in this case, sing)? What does loving Jesus look like?

I believe this morning’s text from the Gospel of John answers that question, specifically in verse 23. [*Those who love me will keep my word*] To love Jesus means to keep his word. Or we could say, his “words.” But which ones? He said a lot of words.

If we back up just a few verses to 14:15, we will find this: “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*” Okay, that seems a little more clear; loving Jesus means keeping his commandments. But which commandments?

[Hold up bulletin] This picture on the back of the bulletin supposedly depicts the night Jesus gathered with his disciples in the so-called upper room before his arrest and trial. In the

Gospel of John, that story spans five whole chapters, 13 through 17. It begins with Jesus washing his disciples' feet, and then continues with a long section of teachings.

The picture also reminds me of our meeting last week, that some of you attended. It was in some ways a very difficult meeting. And it was also a good meeting.

Like I said, Jesus spoke a lot of words. But toward the beginning of their evening together, after he had washed their feet, he said this at 13:34 (about one chapter earlier than this morning's text). *"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."* He restates essentially the same thing later that evening (about two chapters later), 15:10: *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."* He makes it pretty clear, right? Loving Jesus means that we also must love one another. That we love our brothers and sisters, and by extension that we love our fellow human beings, all around the world.

But Jesus is saying that it starts right here [show picture], with this small group of disciples. Or for us, it starts right here [gesture around the sanctuary]. Within these walls. In fact, Jesus says this: *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* Loving one another is a sign to the watching world. [Sing "One in the Spirit"]

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord [repeat]

And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love—by our love.

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

Loving Jesus means loving one another. Or to put it differently, Jesus is not the object of our love. He is the subject of our love, the source of our love. Jesus is not here—but we are. Jesus wants us to love each other. Do we?

Of course, the next question is, what does it mean to love one another? It is something we say, or something we do? What does it look like?

Which needs to be the subject of another sermon. Or better yet, series of sermons. But for now, let me just say that the Greek word for love Jesus uses here is the word *agape*. Which refers to a very special kind of love, a very difficult kind of love. The kind, in fact, which is impossible without the Holy Spirit's help.

As we all know, the Apostle Paul very helpfully expounds on the word *agape* in his letter to the Corinthians, where we find this [1 Cor. 13:4-8]:

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸Love never ends.

Like I said, this is a very difficult kind of love. Suffice it to say that it will take us the rest of our lives to learn to love one another in this way. But this is what Jesus himself is commanding all of his disciples to do. To love Jesus means to keep his word, his commandment. To love Jesus means to love one another with difficult, *agape*, Spirit-guided love. I'd say we have our work cut out for us. We can do it. But only with the Holy Spirit's help.

But this morning's text also answers another question. What happens when we love Jesus by keeping his word to love one another? Or at least, trying to? Several things.

First, Jesus tells his disciples that the Father will love them [*"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them"*]. Is there anything we long for more than that?

That our God the Father will love us? Now and forever? [Sing, “Our Father loves us, this I know. For the Bible tells me so.”]

But there’s more. Jesus says that when we love Jesus by keeping his word to love one another, both he and the Father will “*come to us and make their home with us.*” What do you think: are the Father and the Son here today? When we love one another, they are. They are right at home.

But there’s more. When we love Jesus by loving one another, Jesus says that the Father will send us this [Verse 26]: “*The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name.*” The Greek word is *paraklytos*, or literally “paraclete,” and Jesus talks about it five times in the Upper Room speech [refer to picture]. Jesus says: the Holy Spirit “*will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.*”

My friends, Jesus may not be physically here, sitting and standing among us. At least, not so we can see him. But the Holy Spirit is here. Reminding us, guiding us, helping us, teaching us. I would say that is just as good as having Jesus himself here with us. We might even say it is the very same thing.

But there’s more. When we show our love for Jesus by loving one another, not only does the Father send us the *paraklytos*, the Holy Spirit, but Jesus gives us his peace: [*“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you,”*] Peace. *Shalom*, in Hebrew. *Eirene*, in Greek. Well-being. Right relationships. Confidence. Trust. Joy. It’s the kind of peace only Jesus can give us. The world can’t give it to us, and he says so. [*“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.”*] The kind of peace the world offers is nothing but a mirage, here one moment, gone the next. It is not real peace, but only the illusion of peace. The peace Jesus gives us when we love one another (or simply try to love one another) endures. It lasts forever. Nothing can take it away. Do we have that kind of peace? We do. When we love each other as Jesus loves us.

And there is still more! [*“Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”*] When we love Jesus by loving each other, nothing can trouble us. Nothing can make us afraid. Jesus went away, yes. But he came back. [*“You heard me say to you, “I am going away, and I am coming to you.”*]

Let’s review. To love Jesus is to follow his word, his new commandment, that we love one another. To love Jesus is to welcome into our lives our helper and advocate, the Holy Spirit, to help us when we fail or fall. When we love Jesus, the Father and the Son themselves come . . . to us! We don’t have to go looking for them . . . hesitant, fearful, guilt-ridden. They come veritably running to us.

To love Jesus is to live in the paradox that even though he has gone away, he has come back. To love Jesus, he eventually tells us, is to live in the promise that he has conquered the world. [*“I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world.”* (John 16:33)]

Let us love Jesus. Let us love one another. Let us welcome the Father and the Son. Let us welcome also their Holy Spirit. Let us receive their peace, and practice it, and spread it around. Let our hearts not be troubled, and let us not be afraid.

Amen.