

Keep My Word
John 14:23-29
6th Sunday of Easter
Rev. Don Best
Bethel Presbyterian Church
West Union, Iowa
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For our gospel reading this morning, we go back to hear part of the Final Discourse in John. Back to Maundy Thursday, when Jesus shared a meal with his disciples. Back to the speech Jesus gave to prepare his disciples for his departure. When Jesus was preparing them for the time when he would no longer be with them, in physical form. Our text is John, chapter 14, verses 23 through 29. Listen to these words of Jesus spoken to his disciples, and hear his words to you, as disciples of Christ:

²³ Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "I have said these things to you while I am still with you.

²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.

²⁹ And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

I really struggled with this text. What should I say about it? How to relate it to you, so that you would be filled with new understanding, or insight. There are some really amazing things in these seven verses from John.

Verse 27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

You have probably heard this at funerals and memorial services. Jesus is speaking to his disciples before he will be taken from them. Jesus is preparing them for his loss, and the gift of his peace is meant to comfort them and the gift of peace from Jesus can be comforting to all of us in our times of loss. And that peace, along with "Do not let your hearts be troubled, do not let them be afraid," can comfort even the most troubled souls. But the peace of Christ is not just for times of loss. Any time of your life that is filled with struggle or conflict can be calmed with the peace of Christ. We pass the peace of Christ every Sunday. Each time we worship, after we confess our sins, after we receive affirmation of God's forgiveness. When we receive the peace of knowing that we are forgiven, we take time to share that peace with others. "The peace of Christ be with you; and also with you."

Also, in our reading, Jesus repeats his promise of an advocate to follow his departure. Verse 26 is the only place, in John, when this advocate is called the Holy Spirit: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you."

The promise of the Holy Spirit is the promise of someone to remind and teach the disciples of everything that Jesus has done and taught them. Faced with the loss of their teacher and leader the disciples could have worried that it was the end of everything that they had hoped for; the end of the promises of a new life and a new world to come, but in the gift of the Holy Spirit those hopes would not die. Through the indwelling of God's Spirit everything that was begun in Christ would continue in his followers and continues in us today.

Speaking of the Holy Spirit, this text is filled a sense of the Trinity. We hear from the Son about the love of the Father and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It does not go so far as to spell out what we understand about the Trinity, but every person of the blessed three are here in this reading. When the disciples are possible most vulnerable, they are, in this teaching of Jesus surrounded by the love and community of the Triune God.

But in my preparations for this sermon I was drawn to the first verse, verse 23: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

I thought for a long time about what he meant when Jesus said: "keep my word." We keep our word when we follow through on a promise or commitment. If we tell someone we will do something, and actually do it, or fulfill our promise, we are keeping our word. But I don't think that is what Jesus was saying: "Those who love me will keep my word."

In thinking about what it means to “keep” the word of Jesus, I was reminded of what it says in Deuteronomy chapter 11, about keeping the Law:

¹⁸ You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. ¹⁹ Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Keeping the word of Jesus, like the law of God, means keeping them in our heart, and on your mind, and teaching them to our children. The word of Jesus, the teachings of Jesus are dear to our hearts and should be imbedded in who we are as Christians. But there is still more to what Jesus is saying: “Those who love me will keep my word.”

I also thought about something a spouse or parent might say: “If you love me you will... However that sentence ends, it means that you could show your love, or prove your love, by doing something for the other person. If you love your wife, you should show her respect. Or if you love your husband you will honor his wishes. Or if you love your mother you could show it by cleaning your room. I think we are getting a little closer to understanding what Jesus meant, but not quite there. “Those who love me will keep my word.”

I don’t think this is a test, or a measure, of our love for Jesus. Keeping the word of Jesus is not the litmus test for whether or not we love him. I think, and this might be drawing a thin line, but when Jesus said, “those who love me will keep my word,” it is more of a cause and effect, than a proof. If a person loves Jesus the result, the consequence, the outcome of that love, is keeping his word. Those who love Jesus, will hold his word, his teaching, in their heart, and it will as a result show forth in their lives and in their actions, how they treat others and how they treat God’s creation.

Jesus said: “Those who love me will keep my word.” Then Jesus went on to say: “and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” Another consequence of loving Jesus is the gift of God’s love and the presence of the Father and the Son dwelling in them. Again, it’s a fine line, but the Father’s love is not a reward for loving Jesus, it is part of what it means to love Jesus. And loving Jesus means that the Father and the Son will be at home in the individual and in the community.

For a final thought on what this verse, verse 23, means we need to look back in the chapter. Verse 23 begins with, “Jesus answered him...” The first part of our reading is an answer to a question, and that question is in verse 22:

"Judas (not Iscariot) asked him, Lord how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?"

Jesus is revealed to us in our love for him, in the keeping of his word, in the love of the Father, and Jesus and the Father dwelling in us, and with us. These verses are not about proving our love for Jesus by keeping his word. It is not about earning the love of God. This is all about Jesus revealing himself to us in our love for him. It is about the power of love in our lives and in the church. Where love is, Jesus and the Father are at home.

Jesus said: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

Love is the key. Love is how Jesus is revealed to us, and to all those who follow him. And our love for Jesus, and how we live out that love is how others will see the love of Jesus in us, in the church, and in the world.

Let us pray:

Blessed Father and Son, in our love for you, you are revealed in us. In our love for you, your word is made known to us and to others. And, in our love for you, you are revealed to the world. Triune God: Father, Son and Spirit, reveal yourself to us, and to your church, and to your creation. Your name be praised Holy Three in One. Amen.