

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John. This text does not appear in the TLH one-year lectionary. It is appointed to be the reading for Easter 6A in the LW three-year lectionary. It follows immediately after the reading for last Sunday and is a continuation of the Maundy Thursday narrative. Jesus continues with words of comfort to Christians.

He here makes it clear that there is a connection between being a follower of Him and a guardian of His dictums. His expectation of His followers is that they will keep those dictums pure. He does not share that same expectation of The World, nor should we. We ought to expect The World to act like The World, and Christians to act like Christians.

He also clearly articulates the relationship between the Son and Father and the Children. The relationship is a close one, with Jesus in the center, as the One who brings the other two together, working as a mediator between sinful Man and Holy Father. We are not fatherless, nor are we motherless, but are part of the Family of God, an actual thing.

You may or may not have noticed that the World has ripped apart a great number of Christian families. Children are rejecting their religion and its tenets, and many of them reject their parents and their entire family as well. That has never been unheard of, but what we're seeing today is mostly unprecedented. Parents want to know what happened.

Pastor, what happened? We raised them all the same, did the right things, but look at them. I have been giving the same response for almost thirty-eight years; They became adults. That's the long and short of it. People who are adults make their own decisions, choose what they choose, and all too many of them are these days choosing poorly.

We Christians have gotten away from the idea of church as "family." For American Christians, the multigenerational family that included church was the norm. Not so much now. Now everybody and his brother – from sports teams to businesses – have co-opted the word, but that idea of church as "family" is firmly rooted in Jesus and the Bible.

John is sometimes referred to as "The Apostle of Love." Of himself he says, that he is "The Disciple whom Jesus loved (φίλος)," and he certainly does talk a lot about "ἀγάπη – love" both here and in his letters. He is supposed to have ended each of his sermons as Pastor at Ephesus with the admonition, "little children, love one another." I can believe it.

I have ranted before about how I have run into Lutherans who think that “love one another” is the Gospel. My rants have included the assertion that it’s not. “Love one another” is the Law. Don’t get me wrong. The admonition to “love” is a good one, but an admonition it is just the same. The Gospel is that God loves us, in spite of ourselves.

Jesus, who likes to use figures of speech, follows this section with the extended metaphor of the vine and the branches (John 15: 1-11), and then (12) with the command to “love one another.” The extended metaphor helps the hearer to better understand the relationship between being attached to Jesus and what that means for the Christian life.

Textual Notes

15. When we say that a statement or sentence is “conditional,” we are generally talking about an “if, then” thing; if a certain thing happens, then this other thing will be the result, as in “*Εάν αγαπάτε με, τὰς ἐντολὰς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσετε* – if you love me, then you will guard my commandments.” If you are a Christian, then you will guard the Word.

The translations have it wrong, and we’ve talked about this before, but let us review. The verb “*τηρέω*” means “to guard,” as we see from looking at the seventy-one occurrences of the word in the NT, many of which refer to what we would call a “guard” or “guards,” who are “guarding” things, like the tomb of Jesus or the jail holding Paul, for example.

The KJV correctly used the word “keep,” which was the place where you would “keep” your most valuable possessions. But that is no longer the place where we keep those things anymore, and the conditional “if, then” comes off sounding like if the individual Christian loves Jesus, then that individual Christian will obey the Ten Commandments.

That’s true, and it’s the Law, but it’s not what Jesus is saying here. The LBT translations who have Jesus telling us to “keep” the commandments are misleading, and those who use the word “obey” for “guard” miss the meaning entirely. Jesus is telling the Church that if you love Him with a sacrificial love, then you will guard the Word of God as it is.

It becomes more apparent as time goes by that holding the Word of God in its “truth and purity” requires sacrificial love on the part of the Church. In America, it’s not much of a sacrifice – other churches mock us – but it would be easier to take the path of least resistance and jump in the lake (off the cliff) into the abyss with the rest of them.

Moving off of conditional sentences, we move on to the distinction of “descriptive” and “prescriptive” speaking. Jesus makes a descriptive, true, and logical statement, “if you should love me (*αγαπατε* - present active subjunctive), (then) you will guard (*τηρήσετε* – future active indicative) my commands.” The verb for “guard” is in the indicative mood.

It's not in the imperative mood. Jesus is not issuing a command, per se, but stating the way that things are, and can anyone argue with what He has said? The Church does love

Jesus, and because of her love of Jesus, she guards the Word as the most precious of all things. That Word guides and directs the Church in her doing of the “greater works.”

A quick perusal of translations reveals that about half of the translations get the τηρήσετε translation right, and about half of them make it into an imperative, a command to keep the commandments. Jesus knew about, and could have used, and often does use, the imperative mode to command them to obey His commandments, and we ought to.

So, this is in fact the Law, but it’s not the Law most people think from reading faulty American translations. The command is not to be a good Christian, but to guard the Word, which will guide the Church into doing “greater works.” Those works take place on an individual scale, and they take place on a congregational and church body level.

The clear corollary to “if you love me, you will guard my commands,” is “if you *don’t* love me, you will *not* guard my commands,” or more to the point, “by not guarding my Word you are showing that you do not love me.” As 1 John says, “one who says, ‘I know him,’ and doesn’t keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (2:4).

The kind of “love” of which He speaks is the kind described by the verb “αγαπάω,” the self-sacrificing love epitomized in and by Jesus, the kind of love almost unmentioned and nearly completely unknown in the extra-biblical literature of the day, the kind He expects from them. This is not the first time that Jesus has put forth the concept of sacrifice.

He had from the beginning made it clear to all who would follow Him in the Apostolic Office, that to “guard (His) commands,” would be no walk in the park, and it isn’t. It would involve the sacrifice of things like home, family, life itself, as it turns out. While it is not a new idea in Him, it is epitomized and summarized in this short and pithy saying.

It’s interesting that, when Peter talks about Christian Apologetics, he talks about “when you are slandered.” Not “if” you are slandered, but “when” you are slandered. It’s going to happen, and it does, and the people in the pew run into that all the time. Nothing new there, but what is new is that its most often people called “Christian” slandered them.

If you don’t guard the Word, then you end up ELCA and the rest of liberal churches, who run roughshod over the Bible. Because they don’t guard the Word, they are utterly unable to do the works of which Jesus has spoken last week. They have joined hands together and collectively jumped into the abyss, and they make the world a worse place.

Not guarding the Word, in fact perverting that same Word, they think that espousing and fighting for things like abortion, homosexuality, transgender, and the like are good works. That’s not my opinion. That’s all of our observation. Those and other bad works find, if not their genesis, then an ally and advocate in liberal “Christian” theology and churches.

16. He continues with two more verbs in the future form, assuring them, “καὶ γὰρ ἐρωτήσω τὸν Πατέρα καὶ ἄλλον Παράκλητον δώσει ὑμῖν – I will ask the Father, and He will give a

paraclete to you.” The way the translations read, you get the idea that this promise is conditional, based on their loving Jesus, but it’s not. The paraclete will come regardless.

Unlike the previous verse, there is no conditional “if, then” here. Grammatically, the two thoughts (asking and giving) are connected to one another with *καί*, the simplest and most diverse of all conjunctions. Theologically, to think that somehow, we need to love Jesus before the paraclete comes is untenable. We don’t control God, and especially on this.

The Paraclete is a Christian word, and it has several nuances. A lot of commentaries have a lot to say about it, as does the Internet. A click on the “parallel” tab at www.biblos.com reveals that the English versions translate *παράκλητος* as “Comforter” or “Counselor” or “Advocate” or “Helper,” with “Comforter” in the lead numerically.

Douay-Rheims Bible (A Roman Catholic English translation of the Vulgate) has the safest, if not the best translation, not translating the word at all, but leaving it transliterated as “Paraclete.” I’m thinking that’s not a bad idea, to say that it’s a Christian word, explain what it means, and just use it so that it becomes part of our vocabulary.

The noun phrase, “τό πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας – the spirit of truth” (17) stands in apposition to “παράκλητος” and is therefore identified with it, the second noun further defining the first. So, we know that the Paraclete is The Spirit of Truth, generally and correctly regarded to be the Holy Spirit, Who is said to lead us into all truth, through the Word.

The word itself, “παράκλητος” is an old word used in several different contexts in the literature of the day. In those usages, there are two things constant about *παράκλητος*; 1), it has an origin, and it is sent *to* somebody *by* somebody else, and 2), that it is sent by somebody for the express purpose of *helping* the one who receives it in some way.

Things like a public defender or an ombudsman come to mind as modern examples of people sent to people to help those people. Both of those things can be said of the Holy Spirit. He is sent by God, “proceeding from the Father and the Son,” given to a person to help him, primarily by making the person into a Christian, and keeping him in that state.

It may be appropriate at this point to talk about Christian Baptism, which is done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It may also be appropriate to talk about Spirit, “breath” and “wind,” things that are necessary for life and for the continuation of it, and how the Spirit comes through Word and Sacrament and in no other way.

The Paraclete is sent by God for the purpose, “ἵνα ἢ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα – so that He should be with you forever,” and that’s helpful. The Paraclete is fundamentally connected to the Holy Spirit, Who comes through Word and Sacrament, which is both the verbal and physical presence of God among us, and the way that God dwells with us “forever.”

He says essentially the same thing at the end of Matthew, “Lo, I am with you always...” Connect the dots for the hearer. The Holy Spirit works through Word and Sacrament, and only through Word and Sacrament, in the Church, which is how Jesus is present with His People in His Church. In the Sacrament of the Altar He is really, actually present.

17. Of this “spirit of truth,” He says, “ὁ ὁ κόσμος οὐ δύναται λαβεῖν, ὅτι οὐ θεωρεῖ αὐτὸ οὐδὲ γινώσκει – the world is not able to receive, because it does not see.” Of course not. The verb “θεωρέω – to see,” is the kind of seeing where you not only perceive a thing with your eyes, but you understand the meaning of that thing that you see with your eyes.

This is not the first time John has spoken of “ὁ κόσμος – the World. He starts talking about it in the first chapter and keeps it up. The World looks at Baptism and sees simple water only. It looks at the Sacrament of the Altar and sees only bread and wine. Perhaps the larger problem is that many Christians look at the Sacraments like the World does.

That’s the World, and as for you Christians, “ὁμεῖς γινώσκετε αὐτό, ὅτι παρ’ ὑμῖν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται – you know Him, because He remains with you, and will be with you.” I hate to keep picking on the translations, who all have The Paraclete “in” you. But it’s a preposition followed by a noun in the dative case, so He is “with you,” which is different.

To be sure, the Holy Spirit is “in” the Christian, but that’s not what it says here. What it says here is that The Paraclete is with us in Word and Sacrament. Indeed, the Word that is outside of the Christian enters into him through the ear, and the Sacrament of the Altar that is outside of the Christian enters into Him through the mouth, so are “in” him.

But they start outside of him, “with” him at Divine Service. Speaking of “The Number and Use of the Sacraments,” The Book of Concord says, “As the Word enters through the ears to strike the heart, so the rite enters through the eyes to move the heart” (Ap 212:5). Then they quote from Augustine who says that the Sacrament is “the visible Word.”

The World is not able “to receive” (λαβεῖν – aorist active infinitive = one time act) the Spirit of Truth because of unbelief and refusal to believe. While “The Jews” in John’s Gospel regarded Jesus and His religion as an enemy needing to be destroyed, The World simply regards Jesus and His Church as irrelevant or inconsequential, but that’s changing.

They used to just not care, and if you have ever tried to talk to a member of The World, then you know exactly what I’m talking about. The World has other interests, things that do not involve Jesus and The Church. But lately, they have stepped up their attacks, and the thesis that all bad things have their genesis in the Church continues to gain steam.

The World in America has gone from being passive in the way that it regards God, Jesus, and The Church to being a tool of Satan to harass Christians, especially if the Christians start talking about God and acting like they know stuff about God and like that. The slander Peter talks about takes the form of being called “haters” and various “phobes.”

The response of Christians to being at loggerheads with the World is often, lately, to try to become more like them in the hopes of...well, I'm not sure what they're shooting for – probably to get more members to keep the institution perpetuated for a little bit longer. The ELCA church in town has attendees numbering in the teens on a good Sunday.

They are served by a recent girl seminary graduate and eight years ago built a new All-Steel building outside of town. I asked the local information maven, the clerk at the mini-mart, why, and she confirmed that they are thinking “if we build it, then they will come.” That may have worked for Ray Kinsella in the 80's...it's a common problem.

Such diverse personalities as Rush Limbaugh, Dorothy Sayers, and my sainted mom wonder aloud why The Church is so keen on becoming more like the World. Limbaugh and my mom will rhetorically ask why anybody would want to be a part of a religion that is constantly changing with the times, and isn't religion supposed to stand for things?

Sayers, as might be expected, is more eloquent; “Surely it is not the business of the church to adapt Christ to men, but to adapt men to Christ.” (The Whimsical Christian, p. 48). To remain true, to guard the truth and purity of the Word, is not the easy road, but it is the right road. Every church has a niche. Ours is to have the correct biblical doctrine.

18. Speaking now of the Father – we know that because orphans are by definition fatherless people – He says “οὐκ ἀφήσω ὑμᾶς ὀρφανούς – I will not leave you orphans.” No matter your state on this earth, you always have a loving heavenly Father, who regards you as His children. Not so for spiritual orphans, who have no father like ours.

As for the Son, “ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς – I am coming to you.” The verb is in the present tense; the verb of motion followed by a preposition of motion followed by a noun in the accusative case has Jesus journeying into plural “you,” coming down from heaven into the Church during Divine Service by word and Sacrament. And remaining in heaven.

19. Speaking of His coming Crucifixion, He says of the World, “ἔτι μικρὸν καὶ ὁ κόσμος με οὐκέτι θεωρεῖ – a little while, and the world does not see me.” As for the Christians, “ὑμεῖς δὲ θεωρεῖτέ με, ὅτι ἐγὼ ζῶ καὶ ὑμεῖς ζήσετε – but you see me, because I live (present tense), you also will live (future tense). He never dies. We do, then we live.

He will discourse extensively on the “little while” later in John (16). The World can and does see Jesus as He walks the earth and even as He speaks these words, but after “a little while,” after His Ascension, The World will not see Him, and does not see Him anymore. The World thinks of Him as a man who came and went, and now He's dead and gone.

The words of comfort to people who are dying is that because He lives, you will also live. If the Master *doesn't* live, what hope can the Servant have to live? Church historian Philip Schaff, whose end of life corresponded with the beginning of the Modernism that has destroyed so much, noted in 1910 the importance of The Resurrection,

The Christian church rests on the resurrection of its Founder. Without this fact the church could never have been born, or if born, it would soon have died a natural death. The miracle of the resurrection and the existence of Christianity are so closely connected that they must stand or fall together.” (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. I, p. 173, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1980)

He then elaborates with words that sound a lot like 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul hypothesizes a what a world without that Resurrection would look like. Paul and Schaff would have been horrified at what the “Christian” Church has become, and both would have appreciated Paul Maier’s book *Skeleton in God’s Closet*. I know that I am and I did.

You expect The World to deny the Resurrection, but perhaps the loudest and most adamant advocates of a Jesus who stayed dead are not them, but “pastors” preaching in “Christian” churches. Can they still be called that? For the sheep we ought to have compassion because they are without shepherds. Not so much for the shepherds.

20. Jesus completes this section by eloquently speaking of the close relationship between The Son and The Father and The Christian. Speaking of Him in the state of life, after the Resurrection, He says that we will know that He is “ἐν τῷ Πατρὶ μου – with my father.” The translations get this wrong as well for basically the same reasons as above.

To say that the Son is “with” the Father is very understandable, and we can even picture it, but what exactly does that mean that The Son is “in” the Father? His Resurrection is seen in the NT as the Father’s Sunday pronouncement that the Friday sacrifice was acceptable. We see The Son sitting triumphantly at the right hand with The Father.

21. Then He sort of brings us full-circle back to where He began, three times using the verb αγαπαώ. He tells them firstly that “ὁ ἔχων τὰς ἐντολάς μου καὶ τηρῶν αὐτάς, ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν ὁ ἀγαπῶν με – whoever has my commands and guards them, is the one who loves me.” But if you don’t guard the Word, then you show that you don’t love Jesus.

Furthermore, “ὁ δὲ ἀγαπῶν με ἀγαπηθήσεται ὑπὸ τοῦ Πατρὸς μου, καὶ γὰρ ἀγαπήσω αὐτὸν καὶ ἐμφανίσω αὐτῷ ἐμαυτόν – the one loving Me will be loved by My Father, as I loved Him, and I will show myself to Him.” This goes back to the familiar idea – we saw it last week – that the way to the Father is through the Son, and only through the Son.

Law/Gospel

Love God/God Loves You – The commandments boil down to one; love. Love God, and love your neighbor. The Ten Commandments tell us more specifically how that is to be done, and we are confronted with opportunities every day to love, and sometimes we manage to do that. Often we fall short. Out of love, the Father acted, sending the Son. Out of love the Son acted, coming into the World. He said that the greatest act a person could do for a friend was to give up his life for the friend, and He did.

Keep The Law/The Law Kept – We are unable to keep the Law perfectly, or even well. Especially when it comes to sacrificing self for other or for God, we are loath. Jesus is able to keep the Law not only well, but perfectly. Especially when it comes to sacrificing self for others, He is eager.

Partial Truth/Full Truth – It's not that The Natural Man knows nothing about God. It's that he doesn't know the most important part about God. The only way that the natural man can know the full truth of a loving God who came into the world to take upon Himself the sins of all people, is by the Holy Spirit. The only way that the Holy Spirit comes is by Word and Sacrament, and we are led into a fuller understanding of God.

Sermon Titles

Into the World

If You Love Me...

What's a Paraclete?

Are We There Yet?

The Spirit of Truth

Hymns

Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord – LSB 497

God Loved the World So That He Gave – LSB 571

God Loves Me Dearly – LSB 392

O Perfect Life of Love – LSB 452

Sing Easter hymns during the Easter Season.

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Matthew)*.
Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by
William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House,
1993

GBS – Jeffrey Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary, Matthew*, CPH, 2006

GND – Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*,
Eerdmans, 1982

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek
Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek
Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford
University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

SCR – David Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church*, CPH, 2004

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of
Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html