

*Sermon for 5 Easter, Year B  
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“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Now there are two ways to think about that. It could be that love is one thing and obedience another. In that view, Jesus is saying that if they feel truly affectionate toward him, they will then go on to do what he asks. But I don’t think that’s what he means. It’s more as if the love and obedience are one and the same thing. In other words, the way they love him is by being obedient. This is borne out by the way he says it at the end of our passage. “He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me”. Obedience is the only way to love God.

We’ve been having this ongoing conversation in our house this week. The girls have been preparing gifts for Jenny for Mother’s Day. Now that’s all well and good, but in the midst of this outpouring of love and affection, there has been a great deal of disobedience, defiance in the face of simple requests, and disrespectful behavior. Of course, this could safely describe most weeks in the Dickinson household (and I suspect most of yours, as well), but this week it’s highlighted by the ongoing project of the Mother’s Day gifts. And Jenny has several times made the point that best way for the girls to love her is not by giving her more stuff, but by simply doing what they are asked to do, respectfully and in a timely manner. For children, obedience is the way of love.

When Jesus speaks of his commandments, though, he isn’t just talking about his ethical instruction. He’s talking about following his whole teaching, which includes his way of life. We are to follow him, we are to be like him, we are to walk in his ways. He is God showing us how to be a man, because he is the perfect man. He is fully human, but without sin, as we were meant to be.

And what is this life like that we are supposed to emulate? Jesus, as the son of God, lives his life in complete dependence and obedience to God the Father. He laid down his own life, not just at the end but throughout, for us and in obedience to God. He lived his whole life depending on the Father to show him what to do and when. He only did and said those things that he received from his Father. For the Son of God, obedience is the way of love.

But in order to emulate that life of dependence and obedience, we will have to have the same resources as he had. So Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit as our Counselor, our Advocate, our Comforter. This is the Spirit of Truth, the same spirit that dwells in Jesus. He is the third person of the Holy Trinity, the unincarnate Lord and Lifegiver. He is the very presence of God the Father to Jesus, God the Son. And Jesus says that he will be God’s presence to us forever,

directing us, teaching us, holding us in God's love. And he will dwell within us, drawing us into the very being of God, just as he is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father. Now God lives in us, so that we can live in God. And because God the Son lives, so we live also.

And so, we can live in constant communication with God, depending on him for everything, doing what we are asked to do. Just like Jesus did.

In the book of Acts, we see what that might look like. Philip the deacon is having a fine time of it in Samaria. God is doing really cool stuff there. And Philip is right in the middle of it. But an angel appears with a word from the Lord. "Get up and go down to the Jerusalem-Gaza road." Now that's a road through the desert. St. Luke makes a point of telling us this, because it's a place it doesn't make sense for Philip to go. There's no one there.

But Philip is living in the Holy Spirit. He isn't just doing what he thinks is right. He's following the way of Jesus, conscious of living within him and directing him. He's depending on God to direct him, so when the angel appears, he goes. Not only that, but he continues to listen to God as he goes. And so he hears the Holy Spirit tell him to join the chariot of the Ethiopian court official. And he does that too. And from that encounter a church grew in Ethiopia, of all places.

This is the life of the Christian. To follow Christ, to live as he did, listening to God and doing what we are asked. Sometimes it sounds crazy. Sometimes it's an adventure. Philip was swept away by the Holy Spirit and plunked down in some little coastal town, immediately after he baptized the Ethiopian. But he loved Jesus by keeping his commandments and doing what the Spirit showed him to do, by living in total dependence on God. By all of this we are united to God and we live in the presence of God. And for us, obedience is the way of love.