

John 14:15-21

“If you love Me, you will obey what I command,” says Jesus. That’s how He begins our text. But that’s not where we’d like to begin. We have enough burdens in life. We don’t need to have Jesus lay this on us as well. Some of us struggled just making it to church this morning. We’re trying to raise a family; keep up with schoolwork; keep the yard and house looking good; we’re trying to make a living. And we fit God into our schedule—maybe not every day or every week. And we’re not out there causing problems in society. We’re decent citizens. We do our best to obey God and country. And now we hear this from the lips of Jesus—If we love Him, we’ll obey His commands! So what’s He saying here? That if we don’t obey Him, then we really don’t love Him?

It seems like being a Christian is all about obeying this law and that law; one on top of another, day in and day out. The ancient Druids believed that the “gods” lived in trees. They also believed that the “gods” did not want humans to have any pleasure in life. If anyone was having fun, the Druid “gods” became very angry. A young Druid priest was enjoying his day in the woods. And so he picked up a heavy stick and began to beat on the trees with it. He was trying to drive the “gods” away before they heard him having fun. “Knock on wood”—that’s where the phrase comes from. When something good happens, quickly knock on wood or the “gods” may become angry.

But we know better. We know the true God; the Maker of heaven and earth. And we have been taught that every law He gives us to obey is for our good. The Ten Commandments are not a set of rules to keep us from having fun. He who designed us knows what is best for us.

But understand something here. Jesus is not laying another burden on us when He says, “If you love Me, you will obey what I command.” Rather, He is removing our burdens with these words. There are two key words of His that are very important for us to consider. The first word is “I.” “What **I** command.” Later in the text He says, “My commands.” “Whoever has **My** commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me.”

And so we ask, What does Jesus command? Some see Jesus as a new “Law-Giver.” They see Him as an Example to follow. He shows us how we should live. Friend, Jesus is your Savior, not a new “Law-Giver.” You already have the Law. It came through Moses. We don’t need Jesus to give us the Law again. We need a Savior to take away from us the curse of the Law. That’s why He came—not to tell us how to live, but to live, and die, and rise again for you.

Did Jesus give any commands? Yes He did. But His commands are not the Ten Commandments of Moses. Jesus commands us with words like: Believe and be baptized. Take eat...Take drink...for the remission of your sins.

“If you love Me, you will obey what I command,” He says. And what does Jesus command? To believe in Him. To receive His forgiveness in Holy Baptism. To be given eternal life with the sacramental eating and drinking of His body and blood.

When He says, “If you love Me, you will obey Me,” He is not talking about obeying the Ten Commandments. His commands are not harsh laws. Jesus’ commands are not

burdensome. Would it seem harsh and burdensome to tell a starving person to eat the food you hand him? No! What a wonderful command! “Here, take this food; it is what you need. Take it and enjoy.”

Such are Jesus’ commands to us. Not, “Do this or you will die!” But, “I died for you... here is forgiveness and salvation; here is the food of eternal life. Take it, it’s yours.”

The second key word we must consider is the word “obey.” If you “obey” Me, says Jesus. In the Greek, this word does not actually mean “to obey,” like in the sense of obeying the Laws of God. Rather, Jesus’ word here means “to guard...to treasure...a striving to keep and hold on to.” So Jesus is saying, “If you love Me, you will treasure what I command.”

Friend, isn’t that why you’re here? Even though your life is hectic; even though your days and weeks are full—you are here again in God’s House because you treasure your Savior Jesus. You treasure what He freely gives you. The cleansing of your sins, which He does for you in Word and Sacrament, you guard and hold dear to your heart. The life which He gave you in your baptism, and which He sustains by His powerful Word, is a gift that you dearly treasure.

“If you love Me,” says Jesus. You don’t prove that you love Jesus by following a set of rules. You know you love Jesus because you hold dear to you the gifts of His grace which He freely gives you in His Word and Sacraments.

Will we, however, as people who love the Lord, purposely, intentionally live a life of sin? Will we who are God’s children in Christ blatantly disregard God’s Ten Commandments? Of course not! It is Christ who lives in you. Why would we purposely desire to live under the power of sin, when Christ has freed us from its power to live lives pleasing to God? And yet, we daily sin. We daily yield to temptation. We are so weak.

Are we discouraged? Rather, we are encouraged by Jesus’ words to us—“if you love Me.” We do love Jesus. For we know how we daily need His pardon for our sins. How we love His gifts! How we treasure His grace and mercy! How we love His command: Take eat... Take drink...for your forgiveness.

“If you love Me.” What’s the opposite of love? Not hate. Love and hate are both strong emotions. They’re both strong desires of the heart. The opposite of love is apathy—not caring; having an attitude that just doesn’t care.

Those that don’t love Jesus don’t necessarily hate Him...they just don’t care. They have a “take it or leave it” attitude toward what He commands. They don’t treasure the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. They don’t actually hate these gifts. They simply don’t care very much about receiving Jesus’ gifts through Word and Sacrament.

A little boy was dying of cancer. He loved Jesus. He treasured the gift of eternal life Jesus had given to Him. But his father did not. It’s not that his father hated Jesus. He just didn’t care about receiving what Jesus had to give. As he lay dying, the little boy said to his father, “Daddy, I’m going to heaven now. What is the reason I should tell Jesus why you won’t love Him?”

Friend, Jesus loves you. He treasures you. He keeps and holds you dear to His heart. He does not desire to burden you with a strict set of rules to obey. He comes through Word and Sacrament to remove your burdens. He forgives you. He gives you heaven itself.

“If you love Me, you will obey what I command.” That is—“you will treasure what I give.” And the more you receive from Him, the more your love for Him will deepen and grow in your heart. For the more, then, you come to realize that you, His beloved child, are the dearest possession your Savior has. And everything that He has done for you, and gives to you is for your eternal good, so that you may be with Him forever. Amen.