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The Sixth Sunday of Easter

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We Live Our Lives with the Living Christ

One of the great promises of Jesus' resurrection is that, like Jesus, we will experience life after death. Jesus says in today's Gospel, "Because I live, you also will live." But Jesus' being alive was more than that he was breathing again and that his heart was beating. Our life is also more than a physical phenomenon. Like Jesus, we are alive with God and enjoy all that he has to give. Empowered by Jesus and his Spirit, we love Jesus' teaching and imitate his love for us and others.

Sermon

John 14:15-21

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

Introduction – Every year on the Second Sunday in May people get a little mushy about mothers. They send cards and buy flowers and go out for brunch. And they all mean to say, "We love you, mom." It's all good. Happy Mother's Day!

There were times, of course, when our love for our moms was pretty slim. We all remember times, don't we, times when we were disrespectful or disobedient or maybe even defiant. And it could be that there were times when our mothers were kind of hard to love: too strict, too grumpy, too interested in other things. Love is hard.

And not just when it comes to mothers. We all struggle with love. You've heard plenty of preachers explain to you the Bible's definition of love. The Bible's kind of love isn't "You're sexy; I love you" or "You're friendly; I love you." When God talks about it, love means "I'm ready to give myself to you in every way no matter what." This is how God loves us: he gave us his Son. The Bible says, **Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** And not only our mothers.

This "giving my all no matter what" kind of love doesn't come easily. We have to squelch our own needs to satisfy the needs of others. We have to give up our free time when they're having tough times. We have to give without the prospect of getting back. We've all faced this challenge and we've all failed plenty of times.

The Bible teaches us that love is the essence of the Christian experience; it's the heart of being a follower of Jesus. We love God and we love others. Love and Christian faith go together. That's the point Jesus was making in the Gospel for today from John chapter 14. So, when it comes to love for mothers or for anyone,

The Key to Love Is Christ

He is the object of love.

He is the power for love.

1. It was Thursday night, the night Jesus began the special meal we call Holy Communion. The weight he was carrying that night was indescribable. When Friday morning came, he'd be on trial; but Friday noon he'd be carrying the sins of the world on his back. He was walking with his disciples from that upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane. Within an hour or so he'd be asking his heavenly Father to remove the cup of suffering. But as they walked, Jesus talked. The Easter resurrection would take away the trauma of the next few days, but Jesus was looking down the road. He had been working with his disciples to prepare them for the future and the walk provided some time for another lesson. The issue: What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus even after he's gone? This is what he said: **If you love me, keep my commands.** And then he said the same thing in the opposite way: **Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.**

This is how it works to be a follower of Jesus. If the Bible's definition of love is giving myself to others no matter what, then love for Jesus means I do what Jesus calls me to do no matter what. When Jesus calls me to trust him, I trust him. When he calls me to serve others, I serve others. Loving Jesus is essentially the same thing as believing in Jesus. If you love me more than you love yourself, Jesus said, then believe and do what I ask. Turn it around like Jesus did: Those who believe and do what I ask are the ones who love me more than they love themselves.

This love/faith relationship with Jesus has magnificent results. Jesus said, **The one who loves me will be loved by my Father and I too, will love him.** Being a follower of Jesus gives us everything God wants us to have. When we hold on to Jesus, God forgives us because of Jesus. We don't live with guilt over past sins; we don't fear punishment from God. When we follow Jesus, living for God isn't a burden we begrudge; serving God and others is what we love to do. When we trust and love Jesus, we don't worry about the future because God takes care of our future: our physical future, our spiritual future, and our eternal future. Because of Jesus God has the whole world in his hand. With the Father's love comes Jesus' love. He said, **I, too, will love them, and I will show myself to them.**

The key to love is to make Jesus the object of our love. Trouble is that loving Jesus the way he wants us to love him doesn't come naturally to us. We're certainly not born with that gift. Even now there are lots of times when we would rather love ourselves. Sometimes we let ourselves think that our connection with God is nothing more than being in church on Sundays and putting something in the plate. What happens from Sunday at 11:00 until the next Sunday at 10:00 is our business. We can disrespect our neighbors and disobey authority, we can ignore people's troubles or cuss them out or cheat them blind. We can consign them to hell by what we say or by saying nothing. And as long as we have that big C emblazoned on us, we figure we're in great shape. Sorry, it doesn't work that way, not according to Jesus. Those who love Jesus believe and do what he wants us to do. We will love others when we love and trust in Christ.

2. Of course, this isn't easy. When our love for Jesus lags, the devil fills the space and leads us into all kinds of lovelessness. Jesus knows it isn't easy and it wasn't going to be easy for the disciples who were still faithful to him. Why do you think he raised the subject on that awful Thursday night?

But Jesus had a solution for the problem, and he began to explain what the solution was that night. **I will ask the Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.** Jesus

certainly had Pentecost in mind, just 53 days away. On Pentecost Jesus would send his Spirit to authorize and equip his followers to take the gospel to the world.

But Jesus had more in mind here. When we come to faith in Jesus, when he becomes the object of our love, something very special happens: The Holy Spirit comes and lives inside our hearts and minds and makes us different from what we were before. We start to believe mysteries we wouldn't have believed without him. We think and talk and act in a way we wouldn't have before. We gain the kind of confidence that comes only through him. We can't buy the Holy Spirit or beg for the Holy Spirit; we can't get some of him by being good or trying hard. Jesus said: **The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him.** When we believe in Jesus, the Spirit simply enters in. Jesus said: **You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.** Like a mother, he comforts us when we're afraid; like a teacher he counsels us when we're uncertain; like an advocate, he convinces us when we have doubts. The Spirit becomes **the super glue that sticks us tight to Jesus.**

So Jesus keeps the promise he made to his followers. **I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.** Jesus is looking way past Easter here and way past Pentecost. He is describing what happens to every person in every place and at every time when they come to faith. Christ lives in us, and we live in him. It's a perfect togetherness: **On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me, and I am in you.**

It's this spiritual bond that enables us to love one another. This unity with Father, the Son, and the Spirit is the cable that connects us to love. Without it, love is impossible. If the cable cracks or becomes frayed, we slide back into old unloving habits. But it doesn't have to happen that way. The key to love is Christ and Christ has the power that leads us to love.

Who wants more of this power? I'm sure we all do. More love for mothers and for fathers, too, and for husbands and wives and children and parents and friends and neighbors and even for enemies and for people who hate us. Love that comes naturally and quickly and happily. Love that overcomes jealousies and grudges and hurt feelings. Love that loves to love and love that lives to love. The key to love is Christ, and we find Christ in his Word and his sacraments. We certainly know where to find them, don't we. Amen.