

LOVE IS A VERB©

John 14:23-29

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Do you remember when we used to have to diagram sentences in English class? You had the noun and then the action word – the verb – and the object of the verb. Those were all on one line, but then it could get really complicated as we added lines going down from the verb to add an adverb, or an adjective under the noun or the object.

I loved diagramming sentences! I'm sad to hear they don't do it anymore. At least that's what I have been told. But today, I have a sermon outline with some very simple diagramming ... just for your pleasure. 😊

So the first thing we see is that:

JESUS LOVES CHURCH

Jesus says that He has shown us his love. And also that He loves the Father and the Father loves him and they are one in each other. Well, I think if we haven't understood that, by now, after all this time of reading John, we might not ever get it, right?

And we surely know that Jesus loves us. But do we understand that his words here are about the community of faith - the Church. He gave his life for the Church. He became as a servant for the Church, giving everything for our sake. It is important, here in these verses, to understand that Jesus really is talking about the faith community.

Yes, it's true that he loves each of us who are his children, but Jesus, here in John 14, is directing his words to the community of believers – to his disciples, as a group, that would go out and form the church.

This is one of the reasons why the Church is so important. Jesus talks a lot here about his disciples loving him, but John is trying to make it clear that to be able to continue knowing and loving Jesus, after he is no longer physically present, community is most important.

The commentary on John from the New Interpreter's Bible says that "The believer's union with God and Jesus is possible after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, but like the union of God and Jesus, it is not a private, mystical union of the believer with his or her God.

Jesus words consistently point to the communal nature of union and relationship with him after the end of his earthly ministry. The promises here of divine presence are promises to the community, not the individual. All of the personal pronouns in these verses (in Greek) are second-person plural, not singular."

Jesus promises to send the Paraclete, or the Holy Spirit, to the community, rather than to individuals.

This passage, then, if we read it correctly, tells us how important the Church is. How important it is to be a part of the Body of Christ. It is through the community of faith, and by the power of the Holy Spirit among us, that we are able to continue knowing and loving Jesus, even though he has been gone from earth a very long time.

So we have that sentence – Jesus loves (the action word) the Church.

CHURCH LOVES JESUS

And, the Church loves Jesus. When you think about how long it has been since the Church was established – after Jesus was gone – how long and how strong the love for Christ has continued to be over 2,000, it is something to marvel at, really.

How many great people have you heard of who you never personally met, but their history made an impression on your life. One person for me is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a Lutheran pastor in Germany when Hitler rose up.

Bonhoeffer ended up losing his life because of his faith and determination to continue writing to the church and encouraging Christians while in prison, in spite of the danger he was in. He ended up being executed not long before the war was over.

There are a number of people like that whose lives made an impact on my life, even though I've only read about them. But, it is difficult, regardless of how much their story influenced me, to keep them in my mind or my heart for a long time. I read about them and am moved deeply, but eventually that emotion begins to wane.

I suspect that would be the case with Jesus, if it were only a small number of people who had known and loved him, while he was on earth. Or even those who would read about him, about his life and death, people who would be moved and influenced by all that he did.

And yet, it is hard to imagine, isn't it, that over 2,000 years later, he would be loved as much as he is today; that he would have followers on every continent in the world.

If it weren't for the Church, the love for Jesus that we continue to have and spread would surely not be nearly as strong.

CHURCH OBEYS JESUS

Jesus said, "if you love me you will keep my commandments." That word "love" is clearly (at least it's clear to me) a verb in this statement from Jesus. Think about that word love. It sounds kind of passive, doesn't it? But, we all know there is a difference in saying we love someone and in showing love for someone.

A parent who tells their child all the time that they love them, yet who is not a parent in any way except biologically – doesn't work to provide, doesn't try to make a life for their family; or to protect their child, or teach their child right from wrong – loving can be confusing if actions don't match the words. The word love is empty without the action.

The book of James talks about something similar. In chapter two, James writes that faith without works is dead. I would say the same thing goes for love. Love without action is dead.

"If you love me," Jesus says, "You will keep my commandments." Loving and keeping the commandments of Jesus go hand in hand.

But, you might say, I thought salvation is a free gift. I thought we are saved by grace, not by our works, our actions.

And you would be right. We can do nothing to earn our salvation. It is freely given to us through Jesus' death and resurrection.

But that is all the more reason to love Jesus and thus, to show him our love by what we do. If we just say we love him but don't keep his commandments then, love is an empty word.

And what *are* those commandments? What did Jesus say were the two greatest commandments? To love God with all our hearts, souls and minds, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. (Matthew 22:37-39)

Also, in John, when the risen Lord appeared to Peter and several others, he asked Peter "do you love me? Then feed my sheep, he said. (John 21:15-19)

Another place (Matthew 25:31-40) he said those who fed him when he was hungry, clothed him when he was naked, gave him a drink when he was thirsty, were those who did these things for others. "If you did it for the least of these, you did it for me." Jesus said.

And just before he ascended into heaven, he gave the great commission – the commandment to go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:16-20)

Love is a verb. It requires action to be meaningful. To show that we – the Church – loves Jesus, we obey him by doing the things he taught us to do.

JESUS SENDS H.S.

And those things would be really difficult for a few individuals to do by themselves, right? In fact, it would be really hard for a community of believers to do as much as the Church has been able to accomplish over the years, were it not for the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to the Church and it is because of his Spirit that we have the power to preach, to know Jesus, to love him and to tell others. It is by the Holy Spirit that we are able to do for others in so many ways that we could not do if we were individuals.

H.S. REMINDS CHURCH

Jesus said that he would not leave us alone, he would send the comforter, the Holy Spirit who would remind us of what Jesus taught. 2000 plus years is a long memory, wouldn't you agree?

For people to continue remembering what Jesus said, who Jesus was and is, to remember as we do in the Lord's Supper and in baptizing others is really amazing when you think about it. The Holy Spirit helps us to read the Scriptures, to understand it and to remember it throughout our lives.

JESUS LEAVES PEACE

And the last thing we read in this is that Jesus leaves the church with peace. Jesus loves the church, the church loves Jesus by obeying his commandments to love others; to continue his ministry on earth.

Jesus sends the helper, the advocate, the comforter – the Holy Spirit that teaches and reminds us thousands of years later. And through all of that, Jesus gives peace.

This is not a peace that is absent of conflict and pain and suffering. This is not a peace that keeps us from ever being hurt. If that were the case, those early churches and the many people, over the years, who have lost their lives because of faith, would not have had to go through those trials and persecutions.

And this is not really the same peace that we envision someday, when Christ returns. We have that vision from John on Patmos, in Revelation 21, as he sees a new heaven and a new earth.

“Now the dwelling of God is with the people, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order has passed away. “

It is a shalom that we dream of and hope for when the Kingdom of God is complete.

But this peace that Jesus promises is a calm in the midst of the storm. It is an assurance that, regardless of the chaos and violence or whatever is happening in our lives, we know we are not alone.

We are given strength and courage to endure – like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and other martyrs. We are given the power to keep the faith no matter what.

I think this peace is something to take very seriously. It is this peace that Christ offers us – his Church – in the midst of so much unrest in the world. We can be overwhelmed when we hear of terrorist attacks; of random shootings in schools, in churches, and in businesses.

We can become discouraged when we read of the decline in the number of people in our country who are Christians or people of any faith; we become anxious when we see the decline in membership in the church – in the Church everywhere.

But throughout history, from the time Jesus left and the Holy Spirit came upon those believers on Pentecost; from the time the early church was established in spite of great hardships and persecutions – the mission of Christ has endured; the love of God, through Christ has been remembered.

We must never forget that there is a power greater than ourselves because we belong to a community of faith; we are not just individuals trying to hang on all by ourselves. We have a peace that stays with us throughout time.

Love is a verb. Jesus' love for us is shown by all he did for us and by what he continues giving us with the Holy Spirit and with his peace.

Love is a verb. We, the Church, love Jesus by our actions – by all we do in worship, in studying together, in prayer, and in going out of the building and being the church in the community and in the world with our giving and our work in missions.

We show our love to others – to our neighbors – by offering hospitality to those who are refugees, to those who are homeless;

We show love for Jesus by our help given without judgement to the baby pantry families; by giving food for the food pantry; by giving to our special offerings that are added to the offerings of the Church worldwide that helps others in so many ways.

If you love me, Jesus said, you will keep my commandments. Let us continue to show our love by our actions.

Amen.