

Rev. David R. Solum
6th Sunday of Easter
May 16 & 17, 2020
Immanuel Lutheran, Michigan City
John 14:15-21

When Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” He surely knew that shortly after His departure there would be all sorts of divisions in the faith, terrible persecutions, and temptations of the devil. They would be sorely tried. It was easier when Jesus was visibly with them and He alone did all the miracles, teaching, preaching, and rebuking. But now they would be left to do it themselves. But Christ assured them, that in all things they would not be alone, but have a Helper to accomplish it.

By “commandments” Jesus didn’t mean merely a moral code, as though you could do all the right things in order to be saved. This was no new law of Moses. By “commandments,” Jesus meant the whole body of teaching which He had given them, centered in the love He gave through the cross. He said, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” Following this conversation Christ allowed Himself to be bound and dragged off and sentenced to death. He was thrown into the jaws of hell in order to conquer sin and death for you. You keep His commandments by receiving His testimony in faith and living according to that testimony. The disciples were called by Jesus to be faithful doers of the Word by believing it and receiving it with thanksgiving, and humbly and lovingly teaching and preaching it, faithfully administering the Sacraments, and showing mercy to those in need. They were to offer their lives us like Christ, as pleasing sacrifices to God for the sake of their neighbor.

One would think that such commandments would be well-received. After all, who wouldn't want forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation as a free gift? Who doesn't want God's love? You would think that this preaching would convert the entire world and the disciples would meet no opposition! Why oppose Jesus' commandments?

Because the human heart loves sin and is violently turned against God, who opposes sin. Even the suggestion of sin causes the Old Adam to burn with hatred. The Old Adam knows that Jesus' commandment means the death of him. It indicates a new birth, a change of life, resurrection to new life in Christ. And the world cannot stand even the thought of that. Take the recent example of Samaritan's Purse, an evangelical organization which gives medical aid during a crisis. They were some of the first responders to arrive in New York to treat coronavirus patients. They set up their field hospital in Central Park ready to treat anyone who came to them. But they were met with protests and disparaging remarks from politicians because of their statement of faith that marriage is between a man and a woman and salvation is through Christ alone. These statements of faith are required of their workers, but all patients regardless of faith or lifestyle are welcomed to receive care. Yet after treating over 330 patients, they will leave now with no thanks from New York. Where there is no love for Christ, there is only hatred for His commands, even if what He gives is love freely and generously. They would rather keep their sins than have life-saving help.

For the world loves glory and honor, material wealth and pleasure intensely and will not give them up. Whatever threatens their reputation for smartness and wisdom or self-righteousness and lifestyle choices, they will want to destroy. They will not relinquish their idols, even though

they are manmade and lead only to sin and death. We can expect to see increased hatred, especially as time goes on and our nation and even most of its churches depart from natural, moral principles, let alone Christ's commandments in the Gospel.

But not only will we see increased persecution, but increased temptation. We must ever be aware of the temptation to reflect the world's values and worship its idols. Our nation looks a lot more like Athens today: full of idols with our own Stoics and Epicureans, who see happiness as their ultimate goal. Our temptation to follow them is the greatest danger we have in life. If we are daily, for hours and hours, feeding ourselves with the commandments of the world: mind-numbing social media, the droning on and on of our media and entertainment, all the while we do not meditate upon God's Word, receive the Sacrament, pray, or serve our neighbor, we'll find ourselves loving the world and not Christ. What are the commandments of the world? Well, they can be summed up in one commandment: "Love yourself." Believe in yourself. Fill your stomach. This life is what really matters. Do whatever makes you happy or gives the greatest reward. Love only those who agree with you and support you. If it feels right, go for it. Make sure all your personal comforts and wants are met before you help others. Be yourself, even if your "self" is a sinful "self." And have nothing to do with anything that questions your intellect, hurts your pride, or requires any pain and sacrifice.

The world promises, "If you love me, keep my commandments, and I will give you happiness." But this isn't love. It is selfishness, which does not really make anyone happy; it only gives a dull addiction to pleasure which fades easily. It also makes a lot of orphans, both literally and figuratively. It puts the burden of happiness on you. You must help yourself. It separates you

from your Creator and cuts you off from life. It destroys love for your neighbor. It is also the cause of divorce, abortion, fatherless children, and lonely elderly dropped off and forgotten in nursing homes. The world is good at making orphans.

We were orphaned by our sins, but at Christ's command, we were adopted by God in baptism. At Christ's command we were given the Holy Spirit to live with us and in us, destroying selfish pride and creating new life. We were filled with God's love, so that we would love Him and love one another. We were joined with the Holy Christian Church, within which the Spirit binds us together in our common faith, defends us against false teaching and sin, and causes an abundance of praise and thanksgiving to God and mercy for those in need.

At Christ's command we are absolved of our sins so that we have continued peace and joy, despite our sins and the darkness of this world. We are reconciled to God, which means we can have peace in every circumstance, confident that God is not angry with us and hasn't left us. Rather, His gracious love shines down on us to give us strength and deliverance. Although we are assaulted by the world, devil, and the desires of the flesh, the power of Christ's Word will see us through and ensure that we have the victory.

At Christ's command we eat and drink His holy body and blood, so that we would see by faith what we cannot see with our eyes, that Christ still loves us and is with us, that His saving death is still our salvation, and that His life is our promise of life everlasting. In this precious meal we see more than in anything else how we are joined with Christ and His angels and saints. This is the meal that draws us together again, even in the midst of pandemic. It cannot be celebrated

alone or through computer screens. It must be in-person. It draws the family back together again, pastor and congregation to Christ and His holy universal Church, so that we would keep His commandment of love, which is never done alone.

And at Christ's command we will rise from the dead. Because He lives, we will live. Therefore, no suffering or sin or attack of the devil will be the end of us. Christ's resurrection proves the victory is ours and we will see His face and reign with Him forever.

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Who wouldn't want to keep the teachings of Christ and do them? They are our life and resurrection, our joy that no hardship can overcome! Let us stand unwavering upon the Word of God and gladly obey it, until Christ is manifested again in glory and gives us the victory. Amen.