

P Christ is risen!
C He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

For the last five Sundays we have been celebrating the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But now today as the Eastertide begins to wind down to the Ascension, we enter into the portion of John's Gospel that is known as the Farewell Discourse and we begin to imagine what it was like for the followers of Jesus to be in his presence and then to hear him tell of his departure and his return to the Father. Our Gospel lesson appointed for today is part of the Farewell Discourse. And again, this comes on the heels of the reading appointed for Maundy Thursday that includes the conversation between Jesus and his disciples on their final night together. After their conversation and their final meal, Jesus gets up from the table and washes their feet. Jesus has made clear that he is about to leave them. From the tone of today's lesson, along with the added verses we can hear that the disciples are struggling with that news of Jesus' departure emotionally and conceptually.

In this discourse Jesus is preparing His followers for a life without Him knowing that they are struggling with his leaving. But here today, within this gathering, we all live in the light of the resurrection. We all live in the light of Easter and in the glory of the Risen Christ who has sent to us an Advocate, the Holy Spirit to teach us and to be with us as we await his coming again in glory. However, in our appointed Gospel reading we find ourselves moving back yet again to that place where the Farewell Discourse begins...in that gathering just before the Passover, that meal, that foot-washing, and the conversation between Jesus and the disciples about His departure and return to the Father. Throughout the conversation we hear Jesus assuring the disciples and us with words like these:

^{14:1} "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you orphaned; (John 14:1, 18)

We hear throughout Jesus' farewell discourse Jesus talking about going away and the disciples responding with a question. Today we hear Judas (not Iscariot) asking Jesus in response to Jesus telling him he will not be orphaned:

"Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" (John 14:22b)

In answer to this we hear Jesus say today:

²³ "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. (John 14:23-24)

With the section that I added to the Gospel lesson today along with the lesson that is before us, we hear questions and answers along with Jesus promising that he will not leave them alone or that he will not leave them "orphaned." (verse 18). But as we listen to this exchange between Jesus and his followers, I think the real question that Judas is not asking, and the question we may all be asking is this, can the disciples, still love Jesus after he is gone? Can *we* love Jesus having never

had a “personal” or a physical encounter or a “personal” relationship? Jesus seems to be saying to the disciples that they cannot cling to a cherished memory of him nor can they retreat into their private experience of him. So how do they...and how do we have a relationship with Jesus when he is no longer physically present.¹

Now before anybody starts running down the road of, have you been saved, or do you have a “personal relationship” with the Lord, let’s either put this sacred cow out to pasture or slaughter it all together. This phrase, or this statement that emphasizes having a “personal relationship” with Jesus, *never* occurs in the Bible...*never!* The concept is in scripture...no doubt, but the phrase itself is not. The disciples or the apostles never ask people to invite Jesus into their heart nor do they ask if they have a personal relationship with Jesus. They do not do this because to have a “personal” relationship is to have a private or an individual relationship with Jesus, when our relationship with Jesus is communal...it is done in community with others.

I distinctly remember being asked this question some years ago, and of course I cannot tell you my answer to the question, but the way in which the question was asked of me and the question itself, for me, seemed dreadfully condescending. It seemed to me that the person asking had something over me and I seemed belittled by the question and the person asking.

We seem to have a misunderstanding of the exchange between Jesus and Judas (not Iscariot) in our passage today. From this passage, we like Judas want a Messianic sign that will give us a leg up on others, an autograph or selfie, a trophy, a symbol, or a sign that will impress others, elevate ourselves, and make us feel good about ourselves, or make us feel important by showing that we have something the world doesn’t have and needs to get...a personal connection to Jesus.

Listen again to the exchange between Jesus and Judas and listen how our egos can easily fall into that misunderstanding. Jesus says:

²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; *(and I have the trinket to prove it²)* and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.’ ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered Judas (not Iscariot), “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. (John 14:21-24)

And because of my trinket...I’m in and you NOT.

From the start, this is not an instruction or a definition that determines whose in and whose out...it is about grace and who to experience that grace by sharing it with others. The commandments that Jesus is referring to is not the Mosaic Laws, rather the Ten Commandments, none of us can truly keep that law. Jesus is simply reiterating what he said earlier in his conversation during their last night together, in this Gospel:

¹ Keck, Leander, senior editor. *NIB, The New Interpreter’s Bible, A Commentary in Twelve Volumes. Volume IX, The Gospel of Luke, The Gospel of John.* Nashville, Tenn : Abington Press, 1995. John 14:12-24, Commentary, Reflections, page 749. Questions raised in this paragraph arise from the commentary found in the reflections on this pericope.

² Parenthetical phrase is me emphasizing a human need for a cheap Messianic sign mentioned in the prior paragraph

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (John 13:34)

Moreover, he may also be referring to the greatest commandments he points out to the Pharisees when confronted by them in the Gospel of Matthew:

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ ³⁷ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’” ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: “‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’” ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

(Matthew 22:34-40)

The one thing I think we all need to understand about this passage before us today and about our faith itself as well, is that what Jesus is teaching the disciples and us today is NOT something to be understood as an accomplishment...it is merely a connection to the grace and salvation we are given, NOT because we love God, but because God loved us first. What Jesus has done in this passage today, and throughout the Holy Scripture, is reveal a loving God who does not love us from a distance. And even with His return to the Heavenly Father, he leaves us the Father’s presence in an Advocate, the Paraclete, or the Holy Spirit to remind us that God’s love is with us always in the faith we are given and the love we share because of that faith.

The peace that Jesus leaves with us and gives to us is the very love that connects us to God and Jesus through the Holy Spirit, the Advocate showing us that God will not love us from a distance. BUT, BUT, that love is not complete, nor is it revealed until it is shared with others. Our love for Jesus, or our relationship with Jesus is revealed and made known in our relationships with others. The fullness of Christ is not in you, it’s not in me, it’s in *us*, it is in the others who are given the same grace we have been given. Our relationship with Jesus is not in the self, it is here in this gathering, it is out there when it is shared in community. Our faith, our so-called personal relationship with Jesus is inconceivable apart from others and it not a relationship that is exclusive or closed to those in it. This “Christian” community is not an exclusive community of like-minded people or like-minded believers of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer said it best when he described this community at the opening of his book entitle *Life Together*. Bonhoeffer describes community this way;

It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes.³

Bonhoeffer then quotes Luther following his comments with these words of Luther:

The Kingdom of God is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among the roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. O you

³ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together, A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Pub, 1954. Chapter One, Community, page 17.

blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared.⁴

We are loved by God through Jesus Christ and in that love God does not fashion us or change us, God accepts us and loves us, sin and all, and calls us NOT to fashion others in our image that seems good to ourselves, rather calls us to love others as we have been loved through Jesus Christ. This is our relationship with Jesus, this is the peace that Jesus has left to us. May this be the same peace of the Lord we place into one another's heart the peace that the Lord gives to his disciples and to each of us in this Gospel lesson. In this peace, that the world cannot give, we find an assurance that Christ is with us in our struggles and we are not alone or orphaned. In the sharing of this peace Jesus steps into our fears, our doubts, our conflicts and struggles and places into our hearts, the peace and assurance of God's love made known in the forgiveness and salvation and the assurance that we are never alone or orphaned, Christ Jesus is with us always, And this is made known to us in the relationships we have with others...

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

⁴ Ibid, page 17-18.