



The Commandments of Jesus

Sixth Sunday in Easter
14 May 2023

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ.
Amen.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

It is the last Sunday in the season of Easter. As we prepare to watch Jesus ascend into heaven, next Sunday from the Mount of Olives near the village of Bethany, we are also preparing to receive the presence of the promised Holy Spirit. We are walking in two worlds of relationship. First, we have come to understand that for the Holy Spirit to come to us, Jesus will ascend into heaven. Second, the promised Advocate, the Holy Spirit, literally “the one who walks alongside us,” comes to us to be our helper in this life. It is as if Jesus knows it will be more difficult for his followers to not have him present by their sides so the Holy Spirit is promised to us to walk alongside us.

At my previous church in Boise, the congregation of Redeemer was directly across the street from one of the city’s junior high schools. We were well-connected providing school supplies, emergency shelter, and tending the teachers and administrative staff with moments of appreciation. We literally walked alongside each other throughout the school year. Each year, the school administration would reach out to us about being an emergency shelter site for the school and every year we would, once again, agree to the request. Never expecting to be required to fulfill the emergency shelter request, my small staff and I, would often forget that the agreement was in place. That all changed, during my second year at Redeemer, when we had a funeral for a Japanese veteran whose family attended the church. It was decided that we would host the military honors including: the playing of taps, the flag folding and presentation, and the traditional gun salute by the rifle squad. Being that this was my solo funeral with military honors, it did not occur to me that the traditions of the military honors would cause any concern anywhere else. And after the funeral service was complete, the congregation moved outside where the rifle squad fired their rifles three times, and bugler played taps, and the flag was folded and presented. When it was all done, we went into the fellowship hall to the reception never imagining that our partners across the street would be concerned at all. Imagine my surprise when squad cars and police officers started converging on the junior high school. Wondering what was going on as I looked out the window, I jumped back into the conversation and casseroles around the table, only to be confronted, minutes later, by a police officer standing in front of me at my table. “Can we talk outside for a moment?” The officer asked. “Sure,” I said. “Did you happen to have military honors at the funeral that just finished?” And then I knew, we were the cause of concern at the junior high. The Vice-Principal was a recently discharged veteran and heard the gunshots and sent the school into lockdown which alerted the police to an active shooter in the area. “Yes, officer, it was us who are responsible for the gunshots.” Officer Jared was very kind, also very relieved, to call off the search and lockdown and politely asked me to inform the school the next time we would be hosting another funeral with military honors at the church, across from the school, if the funeral was on a Monday-Friday, while school was in session. I assured Officer Jared we would. It turns out we never hosted another funeral with military honors at the church while I served as pastor. I am pretty sure everyone was relieved that was the case- though I was always reminded of the partnership we shared between the church and the school from that day on.

The Holy Spirit is God’s promised presence with us. In the moments of great joy and in the times when we are the cause of fear and suffering. Jesus knows we will need the Holy Spirit in both moments. In John, Jesus tells us: “14:15 *If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 14:17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.*” The Spirit of truth abides with us and is in us. Not because we pray hard enough; not because we ask



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enough times; not because we have more need than someone else – but because God the Father gives us the Holy Spirit to be with us forever. I am grateful for that promise of God, but what I am more interested in are the words of Jesus before he tells us of the promised Holy Spirit. *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* This last Thursday we wrapped up JOLT until the fall. We used this reading from John for our final small group time. And I asked the students, “what are the commandments of Jesus?” And immediately one of the students said, “don’t kill anybody.” Yep, that is one of the original ten commandments, and we can visit those in a second. but what are the commandments of Jesus? One student said, “love one another.” Yes, absolutely, what else? And then we got stuck. I helped them out...

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

“Go into the world and baptize in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

“Do not be afraid.”

“If you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

“In the same way, let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

“Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth.”

“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink.”

“Seek first the Kingdom of God.”

“Watch out for false prophets.”

“Do not judge.”

“You should also wash one another’s feet.”

I decided this list was long enough, because of course there are more. I had trouble remembering more than the first three. And don’t even get me started on the original ten. I am pretty sure this is why Jesus asks God the Father to send the Holy Spirit to walk alongside us. If we are unable to have Jesus with us in the flesh, we will need a helper who promises to be by our side when our memory fades and the fear takes hold – when we hold on to a grudge against someone when we should forgive; when we hinder the light of God’s glory we are supposed to let shine; when we hoard too much for ourselves in selfishness over providing for the needs of those around us; when we are concerned whether or not a Starbucks is on the way to our next church meeting; when we listen to someone who would lead us away from following the God who died for us; when we stand in judgment, point our finger, and dismiss someone else for their sins, forgetting our own; and when we turn our heads, close our hearts, and wash our hands of someone who is made in the image of God, who deserves the dignity of having their feet washed by the least and the best of us.

When Jesus tells us he will ask God the Father to send a helper for us, it is out of love for us that Jesus makes the ask. It is no surprise then, that Jesus reminds us, that we show Jesus love by keeping his commandments. Honestly, my friends, all of this has nothing to do with Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the dead promising us eternal life. That part of God’s promise to us is complete – you are saved by God’s grace, through faith – that’s it. Done. Complete. Finished.

Loving Jesus, by keeping his commandments, is how we know the Holy Spirit is with us; how we know that we are not alone in this life; and how we know that Jesus will reveal himself to us. What did we hear last Sunday? I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also! My friends, this is enough! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever, world without end. Amen.