

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifth Sunday After Easter, May 17, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 342, 353:1-2, 352, 348, 355.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 6:1–19, Romans 7:14-25, John 14:1-22.

Sermon Text: John 14: 23-26.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus is still in the upper room with his disciples – after Judas left. Last week you heard Jesus’ command to “love one another.” John, the apostle who lived the longest, has been called the apostle of love. Love, especially the love of God for mankind, is a very prominent idea in John’s inspired writings in his Gospel, in his three letters in the New Testament, and the book of Revelation.

Four times in his Gospel John speaks of himself as ***“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”*** (As in John 21:20 NIV) John does not seek to draw attention to himself or for himself, but wishes to draw attention to Jesus and his boundless love for mankind.

Jesus is very specific in stating that these words are from the Triune God. Jesus emphasized that he is not making wild claims on his own: ***“These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”***

When it comes to God, love can be a two-way street. But God’s love for mankind is infinitely greater and more powerful than any love any human can have for God.

God loves us unconditionally – so much that ***“he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*** John 3:16 (NIV) He gave that son to die a most horrible death on the cross to pay for the sins of all mankind.

God’s love is always there for mankind, even if humans reject it. Remember that God’s love is this highest kind of love, a love that will give up its own life to save someone else. It is a love and affection that is totally one-way. It all comes from God. Nothing in man the sinner, the God-hater, drew God to man. This kind of love comes from the heart of God. God’s agape-love (uh ga` pay) moved him to give us such great and precious blessings, not because we could really return or pay back his love but simply out of his boundless goodness and mercy, his grace. His unselfish love moved him to do everything for us.

But God also wants us to love him, to try to love him back out of joy and thankfulness for all that he has done for us.

God loves us so much that he wants us to be separate from the world. In Martin Luther’s explanation of the Third Commandment, we learned that God the Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. Peter speaks of God calling us out of darkness in these words: ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*** 1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV)

But God’s love for mankind is often an unrequited love. In our sermon text Jesus speaks of the love that believers direct toward God, and he tells us today:

“IF ANYONE LOVES ME ...”

1. ***“He will obey my teaching”*** and
2. ***“My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”***
3. **The Holy Spirit will remind us of everything Jesus has said to us.**

God's Word is plain in summarizing his commandments that demand obedience to God. You heard that in our Old Testament lesson.

When asked what the greatest commandment was, ***“Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*”** Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV)

Because of the repetition of God's Law in the Old Testament, we have to assume the idea and the command to love God was not unknown – and had been heard many, many times among God's chosen people, the Jews, from the time of Moses to the time of Christ.

Jesus is talking to his disciples here, to people who knew and believed that he is true God.

But Jesus is speaking to real, live humans. Remember that everyone who believes in Christ as their Savior has two natures. One is our sinful, unregenerate, unrepentant nature – the “old Man, the sinful nature, the flesh, the old Adam, the old self”.

The other is “a new man, new person, new self, inner being” ***“created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*** Ephesians 4:24 (NIV)

As you heard in our epistle lesson today, our old man, our sinful flesh cannot in any way please God. With Paul we must say: ***“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”*** But he also gives us the answer: ***“Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*** Romans 7:24-25 (NIV)

Because of our new man we can love Christ in return for what he has done for us! Yet we give God all the credit!

There is a sharp dividing line here. The line is drawn between those who love Jesus and those who do not love Jesus. Which side of that line are you on? Where are you today? Where will you be tomorrow? It is only by the grace of God and with the help of God that we can love and follow God.

There are those who reject God's love, reject what he says to them, and do not love God because they do not believe in him. Surely you have met such people. In these last days, before Christ comes to judge the living and the dead, there will be less and less faith and also less and less love. God even tells us that in the last days ***“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.”*** Matthew 24:12 (NIV)

While we are on earth, God gives us the command to reach out with the love of God which is the only thing that can turn anyone to God. Believers are to ***“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*** Mark 16:15 (NIV)

And we are also, with our lives, to be lights in the world, so that not only our words, but our entire lives, everything we say, and do, declare the love of God for mankind. This message has to come from the Gospel.

The Law can't do it. The law shows our sin, our depravity, our evilness.

The Gospel of forgiveness of sins is the only thing that can turn mankind – any individual human – toward God. Jeremiah writes: ***“turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.”*** Jeremiah 31:18 (KJV)

God's love must be the thing, the power, the motivation that turns anyone to God.

We are to pray, and pray hard, and pray daily for those who do not love God, who have not been touched by God's love or have hardened their hearts against him and what he says.

But Jesus offers this very promise: ***“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”***

We love him because he first loved us. In fact, we cannot love anyone except that God loved us first.

When one has been called by the Gospel and enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, he has received and benefitted from God's love.

Then and only then can he love God, and recognize the blessing Jesus promises: ***“My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”*** God, the Father in heaven, Jesus' Father, will love him more and more. God the Father and Jesus himself will then come and make their home with him.

And what are the results of that? The Holy Spirit will live in that person and burst out in fruit profitable for blessings here on earth leading to eternal fruit in heaven. God assures us that ***“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there***

is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Galatians 5:22-25 (NIV) All these things will be part of our loves and our hearts.

That’s the picture of Jesus and his Father making his home with us.

The believer, the child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, will obey Christ, will keep God’s Word and commandments, will carefully guard and preserve them.

He will love Christ. This is not a new law but a statement of fact. And how do we react when we hear this? Because of our sinful flesh, we are embarrassed and sorry and repentant when we’re not doing what would be expected of the child of God.

That’s one side of the dividing line.

But Jesus also tells us, and this is a statement of fact as well as a warning, ***“He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.”***

Jesus goes on to say ***“All this I have spoken while still with you.”*** He tells his disciples: you have heard these things and I am telling you again.

Although this is before Jesus’ final suffering and death, he is pointing forward to a time after his resurrection and to all that the Holy Ghost will do.

He tells us: ***“the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”***

That happened in a very public, visible way on Pentecost, the time when the Holy Ghost gave the ability for the Word of God – the message of what Jesus’ sufferings and death meant for all mankind – to be proclaimed to people from many nations in their own languages.

But this teaching and reminding from the Holy Ghost was on-going even after that day as the Holy Spirit caused the Scriptures to be written for our benefit. ***“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*** 2 Peter 1:21 (NIV)

We have the written Scriptures – Old Testament and New Testament – more than 31, 000 verses, about 1900 pages in the bible I use in the pulpit. Jesus himself tells us: ***“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”*** John 5:39 (KJV)

All this is to strengthen faith in those he was personally talking to on this same night in which he will be betrayed.

These words were also written to work faith and to strengthen faith in all who would ever come to faith in Jesus as their Savior from all their sins from that moment on, including us here today.

Not only does Jesus speak of love, but he also speaks of peace which shall belong to all who believe. The verses just after our text assure us that Jesus tells you. ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.”***

May that peace of Christ fill our hearts and lives so that we confess and show our love for Christ every day. Amen.

And may God truly make his home in you! Amen.