

Sermon for May 9 2021

Epistle: 1 John 5:1-8

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he who came by water and blood — Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

Gospel Reading: John 15:9-17

[Jesus said:] “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”

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Our Gospel lesson intrigues me with this sentence: “You are my friends, if you do what I command you.”

Put that sentence into your own words, and what might you say it means?

“You are my friends, if you do what I say.” And that almost sounds like a subtle threat... “Do what I say, or else...” Or else what? Or else, you won’t be my friend? Those don’t sound like words that should come out of Jesus’ mouth. And they don’t... unless you are trying to get the meaning of the sentence wrong.

What is the meaning of the 8th commandment again?

“We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor or betray him, slander him or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him and *explain everything in the kindest way.*”

Jesus calls us his friends. And then he goes out of his way to make it clear, in the very next sentence, just what that means to him: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is about; what he is doing; what his plans are; what his intentions are; but rather.... I have called you friends, for this very reason.... all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. I have let you in on what we are doing, what our plans are, what we are all about, what our intentions are."

Slaves are not let in on their masters' plans... You are not slaves, Jesus says. You are friends, friends whom I have invited into my business, associates to work alongside of me. NOT Friends who sit around and don't do anything, but friends that help me with my chores.

As I reflected on that idea, it reminded me of going to see my cousins. When I would hang around with my friends, we were often bored... "What do you want to do?" "I don't know, what do you want to do?" But when I would go to my cousins' house, out in the country, on the farm, there was always something to do, chores to do. Clean the barn, feed the animals. Work didn't stop just because "cousins, were over." In fact, having cousins over made things better, because now there was help. Many hands make light work. And I learned many skills, and had many good experiences working with my cousins.

Then Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." You are here at my invitation. And I have appointed you, raised you to a position of privilege, that you should go and bear fruit... more than this... that your fruit should ABIDE.

Sure, that could mean lots of things... Abiding means to dwell, remain, live here, continue, go on and on, LIVE... These are the words connected to your fruits. They will accomplish something lasting, maybe even everlasting, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, Jesus says, God may give it to you. For this purpose. That you will love one another. If you want a command, that is my command.

As an illustration of what that could mean, I submit this scene from one of my all-time favorite movies, The Adventures of Robin-Hood (1938) with Errol Flynn...

King: And what about you Robin?

Robin: My sword is yours, Sire, now and always.

King: Is there nothing England's King can grant the outlaw who showed him his duty to his country?

Robin: Yes, your majesty. A pardon for the men of Sherwood.

King: Granted with all my heart. [Cheers] But is there nothing for yourself?

Robin: [looking at Maid Marian] There's but one thing else, Sire.

King: [to Marian] And do you too wish...?

Marian: More than anything in the world, Sire.

King Richard: Kneel Robin Hood. [Robin kneels] Arise Baron of Locksley, Earl of Sherwood and Nottingham, and Lord of all the lands and manors appertaining thereto. [Robin rises] My first command to you, my Lord Earl, is to take in marriage the hand of the Lady Marian. What say you to that, Baron of Locksley?

Robin: May I obey all your commands with equal pleasure, Sire!

The command to love each other is hardly a burdensome command. Unless you happened to be 6 years old and siblings. But that's the thing isn't it? It IS difficult to love the people that God commands us to love sometimes.

Or at least, like a six year old, we pretend it is.

How is this lesson connected to the story in Acts chapter 10 (our Epistle)?

Peter, too, will need some convincing that if God brings someone into the family, or calls someone else beside our own little group of friends... we are also obligated to call them friend and treat them as a brother or sister.

Peter will have to confront this idea with Cornelius.

God sets him up in a dream... All this unclean food...

Kill and eat? No way, not me!

Three times God needs to tell the story.

Then finally he has to admonish Peter: Don't you dare, call anything UNCLEAN that I have called clean... SO when I ask you to sit down and eat a BLT with a Gentile, what are you going to do? Sit down and eat.

And it dawned on me for the first time ever that when Peter finally comes to terms with the enormity of what God has done, sharing the Holy Spirit even with the Gentiles... Peter answers with excitement... "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."

And it also dawned on me for the first time, that as Peter is baptizing the Gentiles what that really means... it means that *the Gospel has changed everything*. And from now on it is going to be impossible to separate the Gentiles into their own court... From now on every believer is going to be welcome at God's table. And when Peter gets back to Jerusalem, there is going to be some 'splaining to do.

At the moment it's obvious to Peter what the right thing is... separating people by birth, by who their mother or father was, is a non-issue. *Being a believer in Jesus removes all barriers*.

That seems to give more weight to Peter's words. "God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." Love does what is right.

You know this story all too well, because I have used it ad nauseum.... But bear with it one more time, because I promise I'm going to add a twist to it.

The other day as I was getting ready to leave the house, I walked into the bedroom to grab my wallet out of the pocket of my blue jeans. I hadn't made the bed, and I was in a hurry to be on my way.

I thought, "I don't feel like making the bed today" as I hustled out of the room.

And the little voice inside my head said... "Well, I guess you don't love your wife today. Huh?"

I stopped in my tracks. "Don't pull that on me," I said to myself. "Of course, I love her. I don't *always* have to make the bed."

By this point I had made it to the front door, and my hand was on the doorknob...

"Right. But when she comes home and sees that you didn't make the bed, she's going to remember how you use this illustration every other week. And she is going to think, 'I guess my husband doesn't love me today.' "

I paused in the doorway... "She knows I love her. It's not going to make a difference this one time."

And I started to step out, when I stopped again.

"True. But she will think it, never-the-less."

That pause lasted a single second, but it felt like 10.

Closing the front door, I, well, I didn't exactly stomp my way back into the bedroom but I felt like it. With a little too much force I tossed the pillows on the floor and snarled as I straightened the sheets.

The little voice said. "You could do this with a smile, you know."

"GRRR!" and then I laughed. And I answered that 'smotherly' voice... "Yes... yes I could..." And I laughed again. True, I was chuckling now as I made the bed..

The voice had to have the last word...

"Your mother raised you right."

I snorted.. "Sure." Still chuckling... I thought, "Darn it... I'm going to have the last word."

Loving God is serving our neighbors... it's the work that He has called us to do, blessed us to do. And it shouldn't be a burden to us, but so often it is. And so often it wouldn't be if we only adjusted our attitude. The Holy Spirit -- which we have because the Lord has gifted us with his comforter and paraclete -- helps us to abide in Him and keep His commandments. Amen

