

John 14:15-21 Keep My Commandments 2020

Recently I was coming to Williams and had a close call with a police officer. I saw red lights flashing behind me when I got off at the east of the three offramps for Williams, turned left onto what becomes westbound 66, and was apparently going 48 mph around that first curve. Turns out the speed limit on that first bit is 35. The young man let me off with a warning, but now, you'd better believe I take that first curve at something close to 35.

I thought of that when I was considering today's passage.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

One of which is to 'love one another.'

The reason for our traffic laws is to protect us and others. To keep all of us safe.

That would be a part of loving others – love is action, not just feeling.

In fact, we know someone loves us by and through his or her actions, not just by the fact that we hear it spoken.

Sometimes we know we are loved without those words ever being spoken.

So, then, I wonder why it is that even we who call ourselves Christian need this fear of punishment to drive safely?

Jesus didn't say to his disciples: 'If you fear me, you will keep my commandments.'

Rather, he said: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments.' In other words, keeping God's commandments is an essential component of loving God.

Love God, love each other. If we don't love each other, then, we don't love God.

This is the foundation of Christian ethics.

I know that God is strong enough to take care of me. It is perfectly reasonable to fear God.

Interestingly, the word usually translated 'fear' is also the word for 'awe' in Hebrew.

It includes fear, and also reverence, admiration, trust and wonder.

God certainly is all-powerful, and can and does act in our world.

And, 1 John tells us that 'God is love.'

We also read that 'whoever fears does not know love.'

We love imperfectly when we just fear God. If we only obey those traffic laws because we fear tickets and fines, we aren't loving each other.

If, though, we obey them because they're reminders of how to care about one other and keep each other as well as ourselves safe, then, we approach love for each other. When we encounter the idea of fearing God and we change that word 'fear' to 'awe,' we temper the absolute power of God with that knowledge that God is love.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. It goes both ways.

Love is a complicated action. Again from 1 John: 'we love because God first loved us.'

Here's where that that Advocate, that Paraclete, that Spirit of Truth comes in.

God sent this Spirit reaching out to us, helping us to know God and God's essence as love.

This word John uses here, translated Advocate or Paraclete, is also translated Encourager, or Helper.

The Greek word used here is only used by the community of John in our scripture, and so it is more difficult to understand what it really meant to them.

It is, however, considered to mean what is called elsewhere the Holy Spirit.

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Jesus taught his disciples, and us, that we obey commandments out of love, for God and for each other. *I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.*

We are connected to God and each other in love.

This pattern of love breaks down all the usual boundaries that happen when we don't love.

It's a circular way of reasoning, but the bottom line is that we will never be alone.

Because God is love, and we are commanded to love,

in loving we will never be separate from God.

Lest this seems to be just a warm and fuzzy state of being, a mystical union with God, though, let's think a bit more. If love is an emotion, it cannot be commanded.

If, though, love is action, it can be. Jesus expects us to act always out of love.

He told us that he would be in us through that Spirit of Truth. He called it Helper.

If Jesus is in us, and love is action, this Spirit is enabling us to act like Jesus acted.

It's hard to treat each other out of love. Let's think of our lives today.

It's not easy to continue protecting others as well as ourselves by wearing masks, observing social distancing and isolation, and putting off gathering with each other.

These things are about loving each other, and thereby loving Christ.

Jesus knew we'd need help.

So, this enabler is with us, an active presence in us and in our communities, as we act.

Helping us to keep this commandment that brings us to God.

I will not leave you orphaned.

Personal words, suggesting the closeness of parent and child.

Given at this most personal time of farewell to those Jesus so loved.

I am still with you, through this Spirit of Love. Don't worry. Don't be afraid.

I will be with you always. Helping, guiding, loving.

Jesus the Christ is in me, and in you, leading us to God's truth
and teaching us how to be who God made us to be.

There's something mysterious about all this, much to ponder.

But one thing is for sure. We are never alone. And we are never unloved.

That's surely strength for this time of isolation.

Thanks be to God.