

Living in the Spirit of Truth

John 14:15-21
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First Presbyterian Church
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The great explorer Ronald Amundsen was the first to discover the South Pole, and he led several expeditions to the North Pole, as well. On one of those trips, Amundsen took with him a homing pigeon. When he finally reached the top of the world, he opened the bird's cage and set it free.

One day his wife, back home in Norway, looked up and saw the pigeon circling in the sky above. Immediately, she knew it was her husband's way of communicating his love all the way from the North Pole.¹

Who do you love most? How do you show it? Where does Jesus rank in that list of yours? We like to think we love Jesus more than anyone or anything on earth. And hopefully that's true. But how do we know? And more importantly, how do we show Jesus – show God – just how much we love him?

“If you love me,” says Jesus, “you will keep my commandments.” Jesus commanded us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...” and “...love your neighbor as yourself.” (22:36-40)

Pretty simple. There's nothing mysterious or confusing about that statement that commandment. We just have to be obedient to God like a child to a parent – keeping Christ's commandment. But as any parent – or child – knows, that's hard to do; obedience doesn't come easy to us.

It's like the father who won a raffle and the prize was a child's toy. He called his five kids together to ask which one should have the present. “Who is the most obedient?” he asked.

The children all stared back at him in silence. Then he asked, “Who never talks back to mother?” Again, the kids were mystified.

“Who's the one who does everything she says?”

With that question, the kids looked at each other, looked at their father and said, “Okay, Dad, you get the toy.”

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” – do everything that Jesus says. Easy to understand; hard to do.

¹ In his book “Symbols of the Holy Spirit,” Gordon Brownville tells about the great Norwegian explorer Ronald Amundsen.

It's hard to truly love God and neighbor in all things, at all times. It's a multi-layered, deep and even mysterious commandment that Jesus gives us, one which we spend our entire lives trying to get right.

Thankfully, we're not alone in trying to love God and neighbor as we should. In helping us to keep his Love Commandment and overcome all the challenges it entails – loving our enemies, turning the other cheek, putting God first – in helping us do this, Jesus says, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This Advocate, says Jesus, is the Spirit of Truth...."

If the Spirit of Truth is our advocate, our helper when it comes to living out the Love Commandment, who is our enemy? Well, what's the opposite of truth; lies, right? That's why the Bible calls the Devil the Deceiver.

The Spirit of Truth is the one whom Jesus says "the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him." Those who don't see or receive the Spirit of Truth miss out on it because the Deceiver lies to them, so that they can't or won't love God and neighbor as they should.

Under the spell of the Deceiver, some people – and that includes us at times of weakness – sometimes we can't see the truth, we lose touch with the Spirit of Truth. This happens when people love something else more than they love Jesus, and usually that something else boils down to money or power, or both.

Take for instance, Jack Welch, the former chairman of General Electric, known for his extravagant lifestyle. "During an appearance at a public forum, Welch was asked what he had learned from a brush with death seven years earlier; had he had an epiphany during his heart surgery?"

His answer: "I learned I didn't spend enough money." When pressed on this – because they thought he was joking – he added that after his bypass surgery, he vowed never again to drink wine that cost less than \$100 a bottle – and he was completely serious.²

As good a man as Welch may have been, if at the end of the day he regretted not spending enough on himself, then he missed out on something in life. He missed out on Jesus, on what Jesus truly wanted for him, what he wants for all of us.

Jesus wants us to follow his lead in living our lives. Life is complicated. The temptations of this world are strong. We too often give into our own weakness and fail to stand strong in our faith.

² Charles Colson, in the November 22, 2002, edition of his *Breakpoint* column.

Knowing this about us, Jesus makes us this promise, saying, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”

Imagine being orphaned. How lonely you’d feel. So vulnerable, such a scary, uncertain future. Well, that’s what it’s like for those who don’t take Jesus into their hearts, who don’t try to live out his ways in who they are, how they act, the choices they make.

Jesus knows that some will not accept him, cannot see him. “In a little while,” he says, “the world will no longer see me, but you will see me.”

Those who don’t see and embrace Jesus leave themselves vulnerable to the Deceiver, the Devil, the Evil One. Instead of learning about Jesus, they learn about the love of money and power. That’s what they follow and worship. And the fruit that they produce is not good, it’s rotten – things like jealousy, greed, hatred, manipulation and lies.

But we who know and love Jesus, we see him – in ourselves and in others. That protects us from all the lies and hatred. And in Christ, we are uniquely able to show others that there is a better way, through our love of God and our love of each other, of all people.

To do this, we have to continue living as Jesus taught us, by putting God and neighbor ahead of ourselves, and praying that others will see that about us, and in us, that they will get a glimpse of Jesus, Jesus shining forth from who we are as followers of Christ. “... I am in my Father,” says Jesus, “and you (are) in me, and I in you.” Jesus sent the Spirit of Truth to live in your heart, and to shine forth through you, to bring light where there is darkness.

If in the end, others refuse to see that – to see the Spirit of Truth that God sent to overcome this world of lies – than there’s nothing much we can do for them but pray. And there’s nothing they can do to us.

As long as we stand strong in the truth that Jesus embodied, the Spirit of Truth he placed in our hearts, we can resist any temptation, overcome all the lies, and shield ourselves from the biggest deceivers, even as we know they’re out there, just waiting to trip us up. As you look at this world of truth and lies, good and evil, faith and fear, ask yourself, what is the Deceiver trying to do in your life, in my life. What temptation are you facing; what lie have you fallen for?

Are you going to give in; let the Deceiver win? And if not, what one thing must you do – or not do – to resist the Deceiver, who is called the Father of Lies? Think about that, for the love of God that we have in our hearts, for the sake of Christ who shows us the way, for the Spirit of Truth who shines light where there is darkness. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

God of us all, we offer our thanks that you are always with us, even when we fail to acknowledge your presence. We thank you for your constancy and love, which always enfolds us.

We pray for those who feel as though they are on the fringe of life. Let our love be with them now and always, through the power of your Spirit.

We pray also for those who feel they have lost their way. In these moments of stillness, we pray for those we name in our hearts, that they may somehow find their way back to you.

We offer this prayer as confident children of God, knowing that, like the shepherd, you wait with loving, open arms to welcome your children home.

We pray for those struggling with health issues, those recovering from illness, injury, and disease. We pray for ourselves, that we might faithfully travel in the footsteps of your son Jesus Christ, who taught us the perfect prayer, that we might pray together, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.