

Day of Pentecost C, 2013

Text: John 14:23-31

Title: If You Love Me...

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Love is a word that gets tossed around a lot these days. It seems like everyone has their own ideas about what love is and what love looks like.

The Bible is full of talk about love. St. Paul wrote a whole chapter about it in 1 Corinthians: "Love is patient, love is kind..." St. John puts it most simply, "God is love."

You probably know John 3:16 by heart, "For God so loved the world..."

Love is a summary of the Ten Commandments. Jesus say to love God and love your neighbor.

Even if you've never cracked open a Bible, you probably at least know the golden rule, "love your neighbor as yourself."

Today Jesus tells you what love is all about, how you show your love Jesus and how God the Father loves you.

Jesus says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word."

Notice what Jesus says. "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word." Jesus doesn't say "obey," he says "keep."

Jesus doesn't say, "The only way that you can show your love for me is by your obedience." This kind of love you know all too well. Has anyone ever tried to use love as a club to beat you with, or as leverage to get what they wanted from you? "If you really loved me, then you would..." "If you really loved me you would give me what I want." "If you really loved me, then you would do what I say." "If you really loved me you would accept me for who I am."

This is not love. This is abuse. This is using your love against you.

That's not the way that Jesus loves you, or the kind of love that He wants from you, either.

And that's a good thing. Because we could never obey Jesus and His word completely. Even if we really, really, really tried our hardest. Even if you did nothing every day but try to be a good person, you would never succeed.

But Jesus doesn't say "obey." Jesus says, "keep." Jesus says "hold fast," Jesus says "treasure."

Have you ever had to downsize? Have you ever had to move, or just looked at all your stuff and said, "I've got to get rid of some of this stuff." And so you sort. What do you keep and what do you toss?

That's the picture here. What is so precious to you that you could never throw it away, that you could never do without it? If you answered, Jesus' Word, that's love. That's love for Jesus, keeping His Word, holding on to His Word like you would hold onto life itself.

That's because if you have Jesus' Word, then you have Jesus Himself. That is how Jesus is with you even today. Do you want to hear Jesus? Do you want to see Jesus, to touch Him, to taste that He's real? Listen to His Word.

Jesus' Word is more than just a bunch of rules. Do this, don't do that. Jesus' words inspire you and bring you to life. Jesus' words are like no other words that you hear. Jesus' words bear the Holy Spirit to you.

Jesus' words change you. Jesus' words take you from being hopeless, lifeless, and dead to being alive in the Spirit, not just for now, but forever.

You will live forever because Jesus' Spirit lives in you. Jesus didn't stay dead, and neither will you.

And the Spirit isn't just about eternity, it's about here and now, too.

Look what the Holy Spirit did to Peter and the apostles. It changed them. Before they were confused and afraid. But after receiving the Holy Spirit, they were bold witnesses, standing on the street corners and telling the world about Jesus.

Peter reminded them about what Joel had written, "God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh." That's you.

God has poured out His Spirit on you.

At the end of the Pentecost sermon, Peter says, "Repent and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

You received the Holy Spirit at Your baptism.

Matt, on April 23, 1998 you were baptized and you received the Holy Spirit.

But that wasn't the only time. Every time you heard Jesus' word, whether it was here at church, or in confirmation class or at home, every time you heard Jesus' word you received the Holy Spirit.

And you will receive the Spirit again today. Today we pray to the Holy Spirit that He would confirm you.

You are not confirming anything today. You are not “making your confirmation.” The Holy Spirit is confirming you. And He does this through His Word.

The Word that you have chosen as your confirmation verse, the verse to give you comfort and strength today, the verse that you will keep throughout your life is Hebrews 13:8. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday and today and forever.

Jesus doesn't change.

On the one hand, this seems like bad news. Jesus isn't going to change His mind. You're not going to be able to get Jesus to change His law for you. If Jesus says something is wrong, he's not going to change His mind on those things.

We learned the ten commandments this year. Those will never change. Jesus will never say to you, “You know what, I changed my mind. Go ahead and take my name in vain, it's okay.” Or “You know what, go ahead and commit adultery, it's not big deal.”

These things will never change.

The good news is that the love and forgiveness of Jesus never change either. Jesus is never going to say, “I changed my mind, your sins aren't forgiven any more.” Jesus will never say, “I've changed my mind, I don't love you any more, I'm leaving you.”

Matthew, Jesus' love for you will never change.

Unfortunately, your love for Jesus may change.

When you come to the altar you will promise, that by the grace of God you will “hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully.”

Many people before you have stood where you will stand and have said these words. They have promised to come to church regularly to hear Jesus' word. They have said, “I love Jesus and I will keep His word.” And yet they have broken their promise. They have not loved Jesus, and they have stopped hearing His word and they have stopped receiving the Lord's Supper.”

They have acted like those at Babel and put themselves first. They have loved themselves more than they have loved Jesus. They have decided they would rather sleep in, do other things, or spend time with other people rather than keeping Jesus' word.

The next few years will be difficult for you. You will be tempted to do what so many other people have done before you, to break your promise, to stop loving Jesus and stop coming to hear His word and receive His body and blood. You will be tempted by parties on Saturday nights, by sleep on Sunday morning, by jobs and sports and family activities, all of which will compete for your love. You will be tempted to leave the church altogether and go your own way.

The only way for you to make it, the only way for you to stay strong, to stand firm in your faith is through the power of the Holy Spirit working through Jesus' Word. Because if Jesus' word is in you, then you have the Holy Spirit, and if you have the Holy Spirit, you have Jesus, and if you have Jesus, then you have God the Father, and if you have God the Father then you will have peace and joy, then you will be free from all the evil that surrounds you and you will have love as a gift to you from God and back to God from you, not as a burden, not as something you do because you have to, but because you get to.