

Sermon: Love Jesus by obedient faith and not just by feelings

Reading: John 14: 15-21

Introduction:

Our Scripture reading today takes us back to the evening of Jesus arrest. We find Jesus sharing the last supper with His friends as He prepares them for His departure. He is encouraging them to trust in Him, no matter what happens, to keep the faith, no matter how bleak things may seem, or dark they become. Their faith will soon be tested and their assumptions will leave them at a loss, but they will soon be comforted.

During the course of the evening, Jesus shares with them something remarkable, they will receive a precious gift, the Holy Spirit. This is the first time Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit. They were familiar with heroes of the past, who received an anointing from on High like... Bezalel who was filled with the Spirit of God for wisdom and understanding
Joseph was able to interpret dreams and given wisdom
Gideon to become a great military leader
Samson's amazing strength

But it didn't occur to them that Jesus would soon be leaving them and the Holy Spirit would take His place, anointing each of them in a powerful way, they had never experienced before. The anointing no longer reserved for a special few, but poured out on all flesh as prophesied by Joel.

Once the Holy Spirit came, this small group of anointed disciples would go on to turn the world upside down. The might of Rome which crucified Jesus and stood against the church, collapsed. The preaching of the gospel went forth to new lands by saints like Aiden, Bede and Cuthbert and whole nations were won for Jesus. Christian churches were built by the thousands across the world and Christianity undoubtedly has had a major influence in the arts, music, education, health, sciences and much more. Cynics like to point out the negatives of the church and yes history does show abuses, and times when evil took hold causing hurt and destruction. We were warned to be aware of these influences as Jesus told us of the ravenous wolves in sheep clothing, which would come. We heard the parables of the wheat and tares growing together. There would be goats in the sheep pen. Evil people have always used God for their own personal goals. But one day there will be a great shaking and separating, the tares will be uprooted and weeded out. The goats separated from the sheep and false preachers and teachers exposed, on the great and terrible Day of the Lord, to be separated and finally destroyed.

Meanwhile back at the table in the upper room, Jesus is sharing words of encouragement and hope to strengthen the disciples, informing them of a precious gift to come. However before receiving the gift there is a condition, notice how the passage begins. It is important to take special note of this because it can be so easily overlooked. Jesus begins this sentence with a small word, but it has immense implications for those who call themselves Christian.

'If you love me...'
(John 14:15)

This little word, 'if,' should prompt us to ask ourselves an important question, 'Do I love Jesus? In our culture we are so caught up with our emotions and how we feel about things. But love is not just an emotion and it's not emotionalism what Jesus was speaking of when he said, if you love me. One of the great passages of scripture on love was written

by St. Paul 1 Corinthians 13. Jesus is not speaking about feelings but commitment, sacrifice, fervency, obedience, Jesus says, 'If you love me, keep my commands' (**John 14:15**).

The disciples in a few short hours will be emotionally devastated by what they are to go through. If they focus on their feelings and act on their emotions, they will be crushed. They must learn to dig deep, and hold to the truths that Jesus has been teaching them. It's not what they feel that will get them through, no matter how much they say they love Jesus with their heart, they will need to also stand on what they know to be true, that's faith.

As a Christian we are often engaging in a spiritual battle where the flesh wages war with the Spirit. Paul reminds us to put on the gospel armour. The first thing he mentions is the helmet of salvation, then goes on to mention breastplate of righteousness and belt of truth. The helmet protects the head and this reminds us first and foremost to know in our mind what we believe to be true and not base our walk solely on emotions. Many Christians have fallen away when they have sought to maintain their walk based on feelings. The breastplate of righteousness protects our heart, for we must engage our head and not just our heart as we pursue righteousness, doing what is right before God. When we are walking the way of Christ we need to walk the way of truth and to have truth tied around us tightly. Knowing the truth is to know Jesus, so when we enter the spiritual battle and we are facing an onslaught of emotions we can keep standing firm because of what we know to be true.

Commands not feelings?

The Western church has become distracted and sidetracked because of emotionalism and how we feel about things. Feelings have become our emotional crutch and our guide for our walk and what doctrines we will follow, rather than what the word of God says.

Keeping Jesus commands is not just done when its convenient for us, or when we feel like it. Many make assumptions thinking, they can do what they want as a Christian because at the end of the day God loves me and He wants me to be happy! (Ever heard anyone say that)? This is a wicked lie from Satan to focus on our feelings and self interests.

At the beginning of Jesus ministry we find Him being tested in the wilderness by Satan who attempts to tempt him by focussing on his feelings. One of the great lessons from this experience is Jesus didn't fall for Satan's tricks and schemes of letting his feelings take His eye of the main goal. If Jesus had listened to His hunger pangs He could have turned the stones into bread but instead He turns to the word of God. Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Commands are not optional

We do well to remember what a command actually is! They are not optional! We cannot pick and choose the ones we like and discard the ones we don't whenever we feel like it. We cannot base our walk on our feelings, Jesus demands our obedience just as He was obedient to His father's will. Just as a soldier doesn't pick and choose which orders to follow, s/he is obedient to their commanding officer. 'Ah', I hear you say, 'What about free will, we have the freedom to choose don't we? Surely I don't have to do everything all the time? Now that is an interesting point, what do you think? Can you imagine a soldier having that conversation with their commanding officer, what do you think the response would be? To be a Christian means we have signed on the dotted line. Our life now belongs to our commanding officer who is the lover of our souls.

As Methodists we reaffirm our commitment to God each year in our Covenant prayer - "I am no longer my own but yours?" It's not just once a year we say this prayer of

commitment, but each time we say the Lord's prayer - 'Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...'

The problem with free will is the assumption that my ways are better than God's, which is a lack of trust and arrogant. If we are not thinking, I know better, then I need to ask myself am I being rebellious by wanting free will? A soldier doesn't have free will and neither do we! This may jar with some when reading this, if it does think about it a bit more deeply, have I missed something important about the walk as a Christian? Jesus tells us when we begin to live our lives in the will God, it is then that we truly find life in the fulfilment of its purpose.

Interpreting the commands

A soldier doesn't reinterpret commands given to him/her but obeys them. Have you noticed how many different interpretations we now have of Scripture and our doctrines of faith? Different people writing books and preachers and teachers making clever arguments to support their particular view and personal perspective. Much of this is rooted in feelings and emotions rather than on the literal clear reading of God's word. Paul warns Timothy about a time which is coming when people will surround themselves with teachers who only say what their itching ears want to hear.

The church strays into danger when the Scriptures are misinterpreted, reinterpreted or mis treated because we don't like what it says or we don't like how it makes us feel, so we....

Soften the word for the seeker sensitive

Compromise the word to make it less challenging for the comfortable

Never preach the tough bits to make it more normalised for the nominal and

Tolerate and accept sin in order to be accepting and inclusive.

Some will say we do this out of love, we in a different culture and a different time today and the word of God changes with each generation! They sometimes say, we don't want to be seen as exclusive and drive anyone away but we want to show everyone how loving and accepting we are as a church. Really!! Are we saying we are more loving than God who gave us the commands and God keeps changing his mind?

St. Paul writes,

'For the flesh craves what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit is contrary to the flesh.

They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want'

(Galatians 5:17)

Jesus is looking for people who will follow him wholeheartedly, keep his commands and have a humble nature and servant heart wanting to do His will. 'If you love me you will keep my commands'. The Christian walk would be impossible if it wasn't for the gift Jesus was speaking of. Our flesh craves what is contrary to the Spirit, so we need the gift of the helper to keep us right and keep us on the narrow way. The Holy Spirit is our helper, enabler, strengthener, challenger, the one who convicts as well as comforts.

Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is exciting, especially when we read of those God has used mightily when anointed by His Spirit. They were far from perfect and made many mistakes as we all do however, their lives demonstrated a commitment to keeping the will of God who called them.

Moses was considered a friend of God and the most humble of men.

David was a man after God's own heart

Joseph was a man who kept faith in God even in the most dire of circumstances

Spirit is not limited

Jesus while in the flesh was restricted by the physical constraints of flesh and blood, meant that Jesus can only be in one place at any particular point in time. However when the Holy Spirit comes, the Spirit can be with every believer, all the time no matter where they are as the Holy Spirit is not restricted to the same physical constraints Jesus had before His resurrection. All that Jesus was to His disciples, the Holy Spirit will be to us.

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth’.

(Jn 14:15)

Did you notice the Spirit is not going to be a temporary help, occasional companion, part time helping hand, but says, ‘to help you and be with you **forever** - How amazing is that?

Spirit of truth

The Scriptures tells us not everyone will accept the Spirit. The world cannot accept Him and here’s why....

‘And when He the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement’

(John 16:8).

The Holy Spirit will be rejected by the worldly, by those who love the things of the world because He convicts the world of its sin and the coming judgement on those who chose the world over God.

Notice the Holy Spirit is referred to as Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit’s role is to impart truth to God’s people and teach all Scriptural truth to the Christian heart, pointing to Jesus for salvation and to bring glory to God. In a culture where we are surrounded by fake news, conspiracy theories, multitudes of online opinions, its almost impossible to define truth from error. Truth is rarely agreed on and at times hard to defend. In our post modern, secularised society truth has become relative, how precious it is to have the word of God and the Holy Spirit of truth.

Oswald Chambers puts it this way, ‘If Jesus ever gave us a command He could not enable us to fulfil, He would be a liar; and if we make our ability a barrier to obedience, it means we are telling God there is something He has not taken into account. Every element of self-reliance must be slain to the power of God. Complete weakness and dependance will always be the occasion for the Spirit of God to manifest His power’. That actually takes a lot of pressure of the Christian who is burdened and heavy laden with cares of the Christian life.

Summary

Keeping the commands of Jesus shows our love and commitment to Him. Don't think how do I feel about this, rather ask how does Jesus want me to fulfil this. When we reach the end of our own strength then call on the help of the Holy Spirit who will guide us and equip us to fulfil all that Jesus is requiring of us. Don't feel it, do it!

If you love me you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth”

Now that is truly amazing and Good News. **Amen**