

If Anyone Loves Me  
John 14:23-29  
May 5, 2013

*Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.*

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus tells us: *If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching* (v. 23). This is a very serious statement. When someone takes on the name Christian, there comes with that name the responsibility of living and acting like a Christian. A story is told about Alexander the Great that makes this point quite well.

Alexander the Great was one of the greatest military generals who ever lived. He conquered almost the entire known world with his vast army. One night, during a campaign, he couldn't sleep and left his tent to walk around the campgrounds.

As he was walking, he came across a soldier asleep on guard duty – a serious offense. The penalty for falling asleep on guard duty was, in most cases, instant death; the commanding officer sometimes poured kerosene on the sleeping soldier and lit it.

The soldier began to wake up as Alexander the Great approached him. Recognizing who was standing in front of him, the young man feared for his life.

"Do you know what the penalty is for falling asleep on guard duty?" Alexander the Great asked the soldier.

"Yes, sir," the soldier responded in a quivering voice.

"Soldier, what's your name?" demanded Alexander the Great.

"Alexander, sir."

Alexander the Great repeated the question: "What is your name?"

"My name is Alexander, sir," the soldier repeated.

A third time and more loudly Alexander the Great asked, "What is your name?"

A third time the soldier meekly said, "My name is Alexander, sir."

Alexander the Great then looked the young soldier straight in the eye. "Soldier, either change your name or change your conduct."

The point is quite clear. Alexander the Great felt that, if this soldier was going to share his name, he must conduct himself in a manner befitting the name. As Christians, we have a similar circumstance. If we are going to share the name of Christ, if we are to be known as Christians (Christ-ones), then we must do our best to live the life Christ lived. Listen once again to the words of Jesus: *If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching* (v. 23-24).

Not much gray area, is there? The fact is, there's no gray area. Jesus makes it black and white. If you love me, you'll follow my teaching. If you don't love me, you won't follow my teaching. And please note, Jesus doesn't say if you follow some of my teaching, or most of my teaching, or the parts of my teaching that suit you, or the parts that don't offend you. He simply and emphatically says – all of my teaching.

That's a big job. That's loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. That's loving your neighbor as you love yourself. That's spending every day trying to be a little less like you and a little more like Jesus. That's worshiping, praying, serving, giving, witnessing, and studying God's Word. That's being what the apostle Paul calls a living sacrifice.

Now there are those people who think it odd that someone would want to live such a life. There are those people who think that there is too little return for this kind of investment. And I'm not just talking about non-Christians who feel this way. Unfortunately, there are many people who wear the name Christian and still think that complete adherence to the teachings of Jesus is an unreasonable demand.

But that's not true. It's not unreasonable. Sure, the life of a dedicated Christian can be difficult, but the rewards of being a Christian and living the Christian life are almost inexpressible.

And in our text, Jesus does more than just tell us to obey his teachings. He also lists for us the rewards of loving him and obeying his teaching. That's where we'll spend the rest of our time today; looking at the blessings that are attributed to those who continue in the Word of Jesus.

To begin with, Jesus promises: *My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him* (v. 23). Living within the confines of faith and God's Word means you have permanent house guests. Jesus promises that he and the Father will live within you through the Holy Spirit. This isn't just a part time residence. Jesus isn't going to be around just in case you need him. Jesus is going to live in your heart, 24/7. God will be your constant companion cradle to grave.

This promise of indwelling isn't for everyone. This promise is open only to believers. Jesus says: *He who does not love me will not obey my teaching* (v. 24). To have this close, personal relationship with the Father and Son one must love and obey Jesus. Failure to obey is failure to love and failure to love is failure to obey. Love and obedience go hand in hand.

Now we come to something very important at the end of verse 24. Jesus says: *These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.* Notice how closely Jesus links the Father, the Son, and God's Word. God makes his home in believers through his Word. Believers demonstrate their love to God by being faithful to God's Word and by putting that Word into practice in their lives.

Jesus also promises that faith and obedience bring a special measure of spiritual knowledge and understanding. He continues: *The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you* (v. 26). Remember, when Jesus spoke these words the disciples still didn't know the end of the story. On Pentecost, when the Spirit descended on them, they were given the understanding Jesus speaks of.

But this sentence has something for you and me. When the Father sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts, the Spirit gives us the gift of spiritual understanding. We receive a wisdom from the Spirit that makes Scripture more than just another book. With this heavenly wisdom, we can see the truth of God's Word, we can hold faith in our hearts, and the Bible can become the norm and standard in our lives. And all of that means we have salvation.

(A side note here is the Trinitarian reference in this passage. "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name." Jesus mentions the Father, himself, and the Holy Spirit as three separate individuals.)

The next promise in the reading becomes the steady anchor for a Christian in troubling times: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid* (v. 27).

What would you give for peace? What would you exchange for the assurance that everything is going to be okay no matter what the circumstances are at the moment? Of course, you can't answer these questions until you define peace.

The peace that Jesus is speaking of isn't the peace that comes from watching the Dow Jones average soar above the 14,000 mark. It isn't the peace that comes from finally retiring and spending your time in your boat or on a golf course. It isn't even the peace that comes from an end to all the fighting and bloodshed in the world. These are the types of peace the world offers. They aren't complete and they aren't eternal.

Jesus offers a different kind of peace. His peace gives you perfect confidence that the eternal safety of your soul is guaranteed in his death and resurrection. The peace Jesus gives has no connection to anything temporal. It's not subject to the laws of rust and decay. The peace that Jesus gives is the peace that passes all understanding. It's the peace that allows the Christian to remain calm while the world is falling apart. It's the true and lasting peace of God.

Now, back to my question, what would you give for this peace? Some might doubt this peace exists and would be willing to give nothing. Others might see the value of this peace and trade everything they own. Of course, this peace isn't for sale.

Jesus tells us the price of this peace is our love and obedience. What all the gold in the world can't buy Jesus promises to those who love him and obey his teaching. Jesus promises that those who love him and obey him will be missing two things that the rest of the world has – troubled hearts and fear.

Our last promise comes somewhat tied to the peace which Jesus gives. As Christians, we know what the rest of the world can only guess about. We know what things are going to be in the end. Jesus assures his disciples: *I am going away and I am coming back to you* (v. 28).

The disciples Jesus is speaking to are both the ones who physically walked with him and the disciples of our present age who spiritually walk with him. Jesus left his first disciples on Good Friday and returned to them on Easter. Jesus then left this earth at his ascension and he will return again at the end of the world.

We don't concern ourselves about a nuclear holocaust or a meteor from space. We live each day confident that God will decide what the end will be and, therefore, we have nothing to worry about.

Jesus dearly loves his people. He loves us so much he willingly gave his all for our salvation. Jesus offers us, his disciples, not only eternal life with him but also untold peace of mind here on earth. In return for this, Jesus asks only our love and obedience. He deserves our love because he loved us first. He deserves our obedience because he is our Lord, our Savior, and our King.

My brothers and sisters in the faith, may your prayer always be that of the songwriter. "Let us ever walk with Jesus. Follow his example pure."