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May 29, 2011, Fifth Sunday of Easter

John 14:15-21

Doing in Love

When I was in high school, we played a game in MYF that was called “Honey, I Love You, but I just can’t smile.”

It went like this----everyone stood in a circle except one person who was “it”, who had to stand in front of someone and say “honey, if you love me, smile”. The other person was supposed to answer, “honey, I love you, but I just can’t smile” with a dead-pan face. If the other person smiled, they became “it”.

If they didn’t smile, the person who was it had to try again with someone else.

Now, there are all kinds of ways to say Honey, if you love me, smile. All kinds of antics and funny faces.

It was very hard not to crack a smile, even if you really didn't like that person in front of you!

But when I think about that game, just the name of it anyway, I think it's saying something similar to the kinds of things that people have been saying to each other for generations, maybe forever!

Maybe even Adam said it to Eve, and vice versa---

If you love me, show it. DO SOMETHING to prove it! Don't just say the words. Put some action behind them!

Honey, if you love me, stop listening to that snake!

Honey, if you love me, take a bite of this apple!

And then God said, If you love me, why are you hiding from me? If you love me, why did you disobey me?

And so it began---

The hiding from God, the focus on ourselves---being aware only of our weaknesses, our inadequacies, our own beings,

Being aware only of ourselves, and not even noticing that God, in all power and glory, is standing right in front of us,

Loving us, wanting to talk with us, wanting to walk with us in the cool of the day in the garden---

Wanting a relationship with us that's personal and perpetual and deep and meaningful.

We have trouble hearing God's voice asking, "If you love me, smile." If you love me, feed my sheep. If you love me, wash one another's feet, serve others as I serve you, If you love me, listen to me, follow me."

God, standing in front of us, asks for our response.

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey my commands."

I don't read this as a command in itself---it's not an order to obey.

It's a statement of fact---if you love me, then you will obey my commands.

It's what you will do because you love me. It's the way you show that love.

If we love someone, we want to spend time with them, we are happy to see them, we are happy to do things for them.

If strangers ask you to do a favor for them, maybe you will and maybe you won't. But if someone you love asks you, you will do it!

You will get up and get them a cup of coffee, make their favorite dinner, bring them a sweater when they're cold, bend down and tie their shoe.

You do things for the people you love out of love for them. It makes you happy because it makes them happy!

No one makes you do those things. You do them because you want to!

It's the same with obeying God's commandments.

If we love God, we obey.

It's not like a boss-employee relationship. We don't obey because God might say, "You're fired!"

It's a loving relationship. We obey because we want to make God happy.

Honey, if you love me, smile. And we smile because it makes us happy to make God happy.

So, what commandments is Jesus talking about?

Just prior to our reading for this morning, in the 13th chapter of John, Jesus says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples."

So there's a new commandment from Jesus---to love one another.

If we love him, we will also love one another.

And in another passage, Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is and he answers that the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and that the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.

In other places we are told to serve others and to feed the hungry and care for the widow and the fatherless---all ways of loving your neighbor as yourself.

It seems to me that love is what Jesus is all about!

If we get confused about what love means, what it involves,
how to love God and neighbor, we need to look at Jesus.

Jesus didn't sit around writing sonnets and love notes.
He didn't spend hours pining away, dreaming of love. We
don't read about Jesus being in love!

We read about him loving----about doing loving things!

Love, for Jesus, is very much an action verb.

He fed the hungry. He healed the sick. He cast out demons.

He raised the dead. He taught. He talked to little children.

He washed feet.

Even when he overturned the tables and drove the moneychangers out of the Temple, it was an act of love! Love for God!

Love showed itself in every action of his life, and in every moment of his death.

Even on the cross he was doing things in love ---
praying that we would be forgiven, making sure his mother
was going to be taken care of, promising the thief that he
would see him in paradise.

Love was what Jesus did.

He didn't spend any time *being* in love.

He spent every moment **DOING** in love.

And as his followers, we should do the same.

It's all very well to sing pretty hymns about how much we love Jesus, how much we love God, but if we don't act on it, if we don't show it, then is that love really real?

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey my commands." If we are not feeding the hungry, giving a cup of cold water to the thirsty, taking care of the poor, then we are not obeying him. We are not living out our love.

Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" With each time, Peter was more and more hurt and desperate in his answer.

I think Jesus might be asking us that question over and over, too.

Peter wasn't sure why Jesus kept asking if he loved him. Maybe we don't quite get it, either. "If you love me, feed my sheep. If you love me, feed my lambs. If you love me, feed my sheep."

If you love me, obey my commands. Get up and go DO!! This is not some theoretical, hypothetical situation we're talking about.

People need the love of God in their lives, and it's up to us to show it to them!

However we are commanded, or invited, or called, to do that, it involves action.

Those of us who love Jesus are commanded to put that love into action----to be doers of the Word and not just hearers only!

Recent polls show what unchurched people's opinions of Christians are. A lot of people, especially young people, those under 30, see Christians as judgmental and hypocritical. They don't see much use for organized religion, believing that they can do loving things for other people without being "Christians".

And so many people never come to church, thinking that there are better ways to spend their time, other ways to take care of the poor and needy, better ways to make a difference in the world.

In the minds of many people, Christians have too many rules, too many people they keep out and exclude, too many people they think are going to hell for too many reasons.

Why would they want to be part of church when church just wants to keep them or their friends out for one reason or another?

Why would they want to be part of church when Jesus talks about loving and caring but the church does not act in a loving and caring way?

Jesus said, “By this people will know that you are my followers, by your love.”

And what if others cannot see that love? Then we are undercover, hidden Christians.

It’s bad enough that some Christians, the ones who seem to get all the publicity, are often acting in blatantly unloving ways.

It’s bad enough that Christians aren’t perfect, and that our imperfections are often seen as proof that we are just a bunch of hypocrites.

But it gets really bad when we ourselves add to the misperceptions of people by hiding our light under a bushel!

It's really the worst when we sit around feeling love for Jesus in our hearts and we forget that love is not just a feeling, it's an action word!

We need to get out and SHOW our love to the world, so that the world will know we are Christians BY OUR LOVE and not by the judgment and the hypocrisy that the world has come to expect!

We need to put our love into action, to make the way we live consistent with being followers of Jesus.

I recently had a conversation with a friend who is not a church-goer. We were remembering someone we grew up knowing, a man who was a Methodist minister. My friend's opinion is that this man was more of a Buddhist than a Methodist.

His line of thought was that for Buddhists their religion is more about the way they live and not just a bunch of words like it is for Christians.

Now, it's true that this mutual friend of ours was very open-minded toward other religions. He had studied them and often went to lectures about other beliefs.

But I take exception to the idea that living in a way that's consistent with your beliefs is more Buddhist than Christian!

On the other hand, it seems to be true for more Christians than I care to admit.

So, what can we do to change that? If we really love God, love Jesus, why don't we do more to show it??

What can we be doing to show it?

Honey, if you love me, obey my commands.

We need to be feeding Christ's sheep----caring for the poor and the needy. We can do that by supporting Bayside Community Center, by supporting Metro San Diego, by handing out Care Kits and food to the homeless.

We need to be caring for the lost and marginalized----
by helping build homes in Mississippi and in San Diego
County with Habitat for Humanity.

We can go to www.volunteersandiego.org and find a
volunteer opportunity that we feel called to do.

We can donate to UMCOR to help people around the
world. We can volunteer at a local school, reading to children
or tutoring.

We can help a student who needs a few dollars for gas
or food or books.

We can smile at our neighbors and talk to them and
find out what's going on in their lives.

We can bring food to the sick. We can take someone to the doctor. We can care for a child while the mother goes to work. We can bring groceries to a shut-in.

So many practical ways to show our love.

So many ways to serve God by serving others.

So many opportunities to obey God's commands.

If you love me, you will obey my commands.

Honey, if you love me, do this for me.

Christ is asking, "Do you love me?"

And our answer has to be more than "yes". It has to be
ACTION!!

Because being a Christian is more than being in love
with God.

It's about doing in love---doing so many things to show
our love for Christ by showing that love to others.

Amen.