

May 10, 2026  
John 14:15-21

Easter 6  
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

## **“Love in Action”**

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Mothers’ Day is a very special occasion in many families, and the Parker family was no exception. It was a day when the family members returned to the family’s homestead to celebrate the women who had been loving mothers to generations of family members, especially Nana Parker, the family matriarch who raised five children, had numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The day was a celebration in honour of Nana Parker that included a feast with food prepared by many family members, games for the children in the homestead’s expansive yard, and mountains of presents and many tributes to the woman who had been a constant presence in the lives of the family for generations. Everyone looked forward to coming home for a wonderful Mothers’ Day celebration with the woman who was a source of love and support for so many people.

A few months before this year’s celebration of Mothers’ Day, however, something different happened; as the family was preparing for their gathering on the second Sunday in May, Nana Parker called a family meeting, something that rarely happened among this family. As her children and grandchildren gathered in the living room, Nana Parker stood up and looked each of them in the eye. Then in a voice that was loving but firm, she revealed the reason for this meeting: “I know all of you are busy preparing for Mothers’ Day this year, but I have a request for each of you. I do not want our traditional Mothers’ Day celebration, because frankly I do not think it is appropriate for us to have a celebration when there is so much tension and conflict in this family. Why are we putting on a happy face to each other when we know we are not happy? Why are we pretending that we love each other when there is so much hatred among us? This year, there is not going to be the traditional party; this year, we are going to learn to love each other, forgive each other, and show our love for each other not in words but in actions.”

There was a stunned silence in the room; Nana Parker had rarely spoken to them in such a manner. But while her words were harsh, everyone knew she was right – the Parker family was suffering from a lot of conflict and tension among the siblings and other members of the extended family. Some family members were not even talking to one another, avoiding each other at the party at all costs. Others would

often trade insults online or by text, and at times even the smallest family gathering would be the scene of great conflict and tension. They would express their love in words spoken and written, but they were not embodying this love in their actions toward each other. For Nana Parker, love in words but not in actions was unacceptable, and she was not going to tolerate another Mothers' Day celebration until the family addressed this problem.

Sharing words of love is important; it is through words that promise love and faithfulness that a couple is united in holy matrimony. But relationships between persons who promise to love and cherish each other that are not accompanied by actions that prove such love and devotion will soon be proven to be empty and useless; love that is spoken must also be love that is embodied in the way we show our devotion to the other person. Such love that is expressed through both words and deeds is also central in our relationship with God and our Lord Jesus Christ, as our Saviour expresses in today's Gospel lesson from John. This passage from the Farewell Discourse in the Fourth Gospel describes two dimensions of the disciples' love relationship with Jesus: the inseparability of the love of Jesus and the keeping of his commandments; and the abiding and indwelling of the presence of God, even after Jesus's death and departure with those who love him. Jesus emphasizes that love and obedience go together, that being a disciple of Jesus means putting his love into action; their personal love for Jesus will lead them to obey his commandments, especially his *"new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:34-35).

- "This passage underscores that genuine love for Jesus manifests in keeping his commandments, rooted in the expansive love of God ... Authentic love is not passive; it is active and demonstrative. For Jesus, true religion is practical and tangible, expressed through acts of love that mirror God's own. His commandments, therefore, are not arbitrary rules, but invitations to participate in God's loving mission." – Yung Suk Kim.

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As the Son loves the Father and obeys his will (*"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."* – 15:10), so too must the disciples love Jesus and obey his will, which is the same as the Father's will; *"through lives of love and obedience to Jesus, the disciples are conformed to the Father, and the divine love will shine forth radiantly through him."* (Francis Martin and William Wright). "Commandments" (*entolai*), "Word" (*logos*) and "words" (*logoi*) are all synonyms that point to the totality of what Jesus says and reveals about God. These words need to be placed alongside

Jesus' earlier teachings about faithfulness to his word, which he cites as the mark of belonging to him:

- “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” – 8:31.
- “I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my word as a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge.” – 12:47-48.

Jesus' words also point to ways in which the disciples' love and obedience to Jesus determine their relationship with God. The disciples will share in the Father's love as a result of their love of Jesus: *“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”* (14:21). The mutual love of God, Jesus, and the disciples provides the context in which the three promises of the indwelling of the divine presence in the community are to be heard: the promise of the coming of the Paraclete, of Jesus return, and of the advent of God and Jesus. As Jesus' words are spoken in the context of the Farewell Discourse in the hours before his crucifixion and resurrection, they are words of assurance to the disciples that their loving obedience in keeping Jesus' commandments is not something that they will have to pursue on their own. Jesus promises his followers that *“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”* (14:16). The noun “Advocate” is also known as the “Paraclete” (*parakaleo*), John's unique phrase for the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Jesus identifies his request to God as the origin of God's gift of the Paraclete, the one who is the “Spirit of truth” because he is the Spirit of Jesus who is *“the Way, and the Truth, and the Life”* (14:6), the revelation of God. The use of the adjective “another” suggests that Jesus was also a Paraclete, one who is an Advocate, a Comforter, and an Encourager (*“But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”* – 1 John 2:1). In the Fourth Gospel, “Paraclete” is not simply another name for the Holy Spirit but is a particular way of describing the functions of the Spirit, functions held in common with Jesus. What the Paraclete does is not new but is a continuation of the work of Jesus; *“the Paraclete's primary function is to safeguard and sustain the believing community, enabling it to persevere and bear witness to God's love-driven mission in the face of adversity.”* (Kim).

As the “Spirit of truth” (14:17), the Paraclete will keep the truth of Jesus present in the world after Jesus' departure; *“as with the unity of God and Jesus in their work, the relationship between Jesus and the Paraclete is also defined by the unity of their*

*work.*” (Gail O’Day). The response of the world to the Paraclete’s presence echoes the response of the world to the Incarnation itself, a division between those who receive and those who do not receive (“*He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him.*” – 1:10). The focus here, however, is the assurance of what the Paraclete gives to Jesus’ “own,” those who do receive him (“*But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become the children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God*” – 1:12-13). Knowledge of the Paraclete is defined by the Paraclete’s abiding presence within the believing community (“*You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.*” – 14:17b). “*The Paraclete ensures that the revelation of God in the incarnation does not end with Jesus’ death and return to God.*” (O’Day). The disciples, unlike the world, have an openness to Jesus in faith, which in turn disposes them to the Spirit. Through the Spirit, God comes to dwell in the hearts of Jesus’ disciples, as the Father dwells in Jesus and Jesus dwells in the Father (“*Believe in me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.*” – 14:11).

- “As the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit serves as a counselor to the disciples. He will give comfort and help to the disciples when the hostile, unbelieving world persecutes them. Dwelling in the disciples, he will lead them to a deeper understanding of Jesus and enable them to bear witness to him. The Spirit also serves as a prosecutor against the world, for he will prove to the disciples that the world is wrong about ‘sin and righteousness and condemnation’ (16:8).” – Martin and Wright.

The second promise the disciples receive about the continuing presence is Jesus’ promise of his own return: “*I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you*” (14:18). “Orphan” (*orphanos*) was a common metaphor to describe disciples without their masters. Jesus’ promise that he will not leave his disciples orphaned recalls his use of the address “little children” at the Last Supper (“*Little children, I am with you only a little longer.*” – 13:33). Jesus’ promise to return counters any perception of Jesus’ death as the abandonment of his own; for even though “*in a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live*” (14:19). This may be seen as an anticipatory description of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances, including when he “*came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’*” (20:19). As in the promise of the Paraclete, Jesus’ promise of his Easter return makes a distinction between the world and the believing community:

- “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” – 17:25-26.

Jesus’ resurrection life gives life to the believers because it is the ultimate demonstration that Jesus is indeed “*the resurrection and the life*” (11:25). The disciples will see Jesus again after the resurrection, and his resurrection will enable the disciples to share in his eternal, resurrected life. A new relationship of communion and indwelling will be created between the risen Jesus and the disciples: “*On that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you*” (14:20). “On that day” echoes the time of eschatological fulfillment (“*On that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel.*” – Isaiah 4:2). The events of Jesus’ hour – his departure and return – usher in a new age with God, an age in which the full mutuality and intimacy with God, Jesus, and the believers will be experienced. The Paraclete’s presence will make the events of the resurrection available beyond their limited moment of time.

- “The first and foremost point about Christ’s being in the Father is that we do not doubt that everything this man says and does stands and must stand in heaven before all the angels, in the world before all tyrants, in hell before all devils, in the heart before every evil conscience and one’s own thoughts ... I Christ I have the Father’s will and heart. If you comprehend this, then you comprehend and see Christ in the Father and the Father in Christ; then you see no anger, death, or hell, but sheer grace, compassion, heaven, and life.” – Martin Luther.

The interrelatedness in the lives of the believing community of the love of Jesus, the keeping of Jesus’ commandments, and the indwelling of the divine presence is evident in Jesus’ self-revelation: “*They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.*” (14:21). When the disciples live in love, and thereby keep Jesus’ word, they experience the love of God, and through that love they also experience the love of God and Jesus. Obedience is the lifestyle of loving God. The disciples’ response of love and obedience to Jesus leads them into a deeper intimacy with the Father; “*by loving and obeying Jesus, disciples are given to know more deeply his reality as the risen Lord and the divine love given to him.*” (Martin and Wright).

- “[Jesus’ words present] a compelling vision of the Christian life, one characterized by living in love, obedience, and constant reliance on the Advocate’s empowering presence. The passage unequivocally emphasizes that genuine love for Jesus is not merely a feeling but is actively demonstrated through keeping his commandments, which themselves are a radiant reflection of God’s boundless and inclusive love for all humanity.” – Kim.

Martin Luther once defined Christianity as “faith active in love,” that while “*a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none, a Christian is [also] a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all*” (*The Freedom of a Christian*). While through Christ’s death and resurrection we are liberated from the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil, this does not mean that we are liberated from our neighbour or from the will of God expressed in Jesus’ commandment to love one another. Our response to God’s love in Jesus Christ is to live as God would have us as God’s own people: to “*thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.*” (*Small Catechism*).

- “But he does not say to love with words alone. There must be living works and the evidence of love, as the words ‘keep my words’ mean. That refers to a love that fights and overcomes. For it is the nature of true love to do all things for the sake of the beloved, and there is nothing too hard for her to suffer and to bear that she would not do with joy.” – Sermon on John 14:23-31.

When Mothers’ Day arrived at the Parker homestead that year, things were quite different. The family still gathered, but in place of the usual celebration and gift-giving there was a family meeting in which each member spoke of their concerns for the health and well-being of the family and the need for healing and reconciliation among those who were in conflict with each other. At the end, Nana Parker rose from her chair and addressed her large family: “This is what it means to be family and love one another! Let’s not make our love something that’s only empty words we speak or put on cards we throw away. Let’s live that love every day and in every way!” Soon after, members of the family sought each other out; there were hugs, tears, words of forgiveness, and a spirit of true love and reconciliation. It was a Mothers’ Day when they expressed their love not in mere words but in actions that was healing and transformational.

It is important for us to express our faith and love for God in our creeds and confessions; but Christian faith is not merely about knowing what we believe and teach; it is a faith that is active in the way we live in obedience to Jesus’ command

to love one another. We are to “*serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth*” (ELW Affirmation of Baptism). It is our love in action, our faith active in love, which will offer compelling evidence of “*Christ’s enduring presence and active reign in the lives of believers and the world around them.*” (Kim). As the family of faith, may we honour our Lord and those who have gone before us in committing ourselves to proving our love for God in Jesus Christ our Lord by living according to his commandment to love one another; may the world know we are Christians by our love!

Amen.