

Acts 17:22-31; John 14:15-21

To love Jesus

Last week, we thought about many dwelling places in the Father's house. Do you remember what these dwelling places were? When we received Jesus Christ as our saviour, we became to live in Christ. We also became the household of God. There, we are nurtured, and we grow to maturity. In the end, we become another dwelling place for those who need to belong to the house of God. Now the conversation continues. Jesus says if we love him, we should keep the commandment that he gave us. What does it mean really? How are they – to love Jesus and to keep the commandment related? It is what we will explore today. First, what is to love Jesus? And then, how do we become to love him? And what is to live like Jesus?

1. What is to love Jesus?

What is love for you? There are different kinds of love in the world. For example, there is love between two people, between parents and children, between friends, between a teacher and disciples. In English, we have only one word to express any kind of love. But in Greek, there are different words depending on what kind of love it is. We already know some of them such as *Eros* (ἔρως *érōs*) between two lovers, *Storge* (στοργή *storgē*) - familial love such as the love of a parent towards children and vice versa. Love among friends, such as brotherly love is called *philia* (φιλία), and the love that we are talking about here is *Agape* (ἀγάπη) which is the highest form of love, the love of God for people, and people for God. In Jesus' time, *Agape* had been rarely used in the secular world. Apart from these four, there are other words that express different kinds of love, but it is enough for now.

Regardless of its kind, the first thing we know about love is that it is based on an intimate relationship with someone. We cannot fall in love with the abstract. Love comes through an encounter with another person. The same is true of the Christian faith. If faith is a relationship with the living Christ and the living God who sent him, then faith can only come through an encounter with them. As such, coming to faith is analogous to falling in love. When we say that we love Jesus, it comes from an intimate relationship with him. So, faith in Christ means that we are deeply in love even forgetting about one's self. What is interesting here is that this love and this faith are not obtained through practice or meditation. But when Christ's infinite love enfolds us, then we enter into this *Agape*. Now Jesus is offering this love to his disciples.

In John 14:18-19, Jesus knows the Easter will come when he says, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you" and "because I live, you also will live" (14:18-19). Indeed, Jesus is saying that his love for them will continue even after death.

Jesus' anticipated Easter message is that life rather than death has the final word, and this is crucial for faith. It is because, in John's gospel, faith is a relationship with a living being. For there to be authentic faith in Jesus, people must be able to relate to the living Jesus - a Jesus who is not absent but present. Otherwise, faith is reduced to the memory of a Jesus who died long ago. But here is the difficulty. Why would anyone believe that authentic life comes from a Jesus who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, a Jesus whom they cannot see? The honest answer is that no one would believe it - apart from the work of the Spirit. For it is the Spirit who makes the presence of the living Jesus and his Father known. To this, we now turn.

2. How do we love Jesus?

In John 14:15, Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."¹ That is, Jesus wants us to love one another as he has loved us.² When we love one another, Jesus would regard it as love for him. But here is a difficulty. If one party leaves the love relationship, how can this love continue? To this, Jesus says, "...I will ask

¹ John 14:15 Ἐὰν ἀγαπᾷτέ με, τὰς ἐντολὰς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσετε.

² John 13:34

the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”³ ‘Another’ means that this coming advocate will do the same thing that Jesus has been doing.

John’s gospel calls the Spirit the *paraklētos* or advocate, which is a term for someone who is called to one’s side as a source of help. In modern contexts someone may serve as an advocate in the court system, in the health care network, or in an educational institution, while other advocates may press the legislature to act on behalf of a certain cause. In John, the Spirit is the advocate who brings our case up before God in the hope that God will do something merciful for us. But here the direction is the opposite. God has already given the gift of love freely through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and such love is what creates genuine life. The Spirit is the advocate who brings the truth of that love and life to *people* in this time after Easter, which makes faith possible.

And Jesus says something interesting in v14. “This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.” Here Jesus explains why the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth. If the Spirit is not given to anyone, it is not possible to know who the Spirit of truth is. It may make us feel very passive, as we are living in a society where one’s independent decision making on any issue is highly encouraged. But love as Agape does not follow what human society would advocate. It is not based on a give and take relationship either. It is given to us as a gift from God. So, we are not the owner of this love, but participants in this love. But how does it exactly work, do you think?

3. *What is to live like Jesus?*

In contrast to the other NT writings, in John, the word ‘commandment’ (ἐντολή *entole*) is never used of the law (Mosaic Torah). Rather, the word commandment is used for the commission of the Father given to the Son. For example, in ‘The Good Shepherd’ (10:18), Jesus says, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”⁴ Here we see that the Father commissioned the Son to save a life. It is also seen in the new commandment in 13:34.⁵ God’s commandment (ἐντολή- *entole*) thus has a twofold meaning: faith in the Son, Jesus Christ, and mutual love.⁶ Neither the Father nor the Son is acting alone but together. The same thing is applied to the believers in Christ. We can see how it works through Paul’s case in Acts 17:22-31.

When Paul is engaging Athenians in conversation in the Areopagus, Paul effectively says about love and commandment in which God has shown God’s beloved people. When we think about his beginning as an antagonist of Jesus, indeed Paul was transformed into a new person who is capable enough to deliver the good news to the Athenians. To make a long story short, Paul came to know who Jesus was, to love him and to have faith in Jesus. For Paul, delivering the good news that has made him live again to total strangers was a way of keeping the new commandment. If we have really good things, we may wish to share it others, may we not?

In our storytime, we have learned a little bit about Rosslyn chapel in Scotland. The question was, what is love (Agape) in this story? When you listened to the story, you may have wondered as the story has nothing to do with love. But as the story unfolds, we begin to imagine that the whole chapel is technically singing! Apparently, the hymn which is sung by the chapel, only God can listen to it. To love Jesus and to keep the new commandment are not different from this. Every believer becomes one musical note to play this cosmic melody to praise the Lord and His wonderful work. What I see as love (Agape) in Rosslyn chapel is that the singing chapel itself together with people are physically displaying what love (Agape) is. I'd like to hear what kind of love you've found in the story. May God bless us continually as we love one another today, tomorrow and always. Amen.

³ John 14:16

⁴ Cf. John 12:49, 50; 15:10

⁵ See also 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12

⁶ 1 John 3:23