

Sunday – May 29, 2011
Pastor - Rev. Walter W. Westbrook
Sermon – **Not Orphaned**

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Scripture: John 14:15-21

We need to look at this passage in the context of Jesus' Farewell Discourse (John 14-16). This whole monologue occurs at the Last Supper, right before Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane and is arrested, thus beginning his torture and leading to his execution, as well as his resurrection and ascension, and the birth of the Church on Pentecost.

Glen Cannon preached on the opening section of the Farewell Discourse last Sunday. Jesus began to prepare his disciples for his physical absence from them. In today's section, he talks about love.

What is this love that Jesus wants from his disciples (and the Church)?

Anyone with their eyes open can see the love that shoots through the life and teachings of our Savior, through the entire Gospel. Jesus teaches his followers to love their neighbors as they love themselves; to love their enemies, to refuse to judge others (and ourselves), to forgive over and over.

Where does this love come from? **vv 15, 21** - it comes from keeping Christ's commandments to love. God empowers us to love with this divine love, but we can succeed in this only if we are obedient, only if we commit ourselves to being loving - not just to our friends and family, but to everybody.

Can the disciples still love him when he's gone?

Yes, but in a surprising way. Not as a cherished memory. Not by repeatedly turning to their personal experience of him. They continue to love him by *doing his works (vv 12-14) and by keeping his commandments (vv 15-24)*. Only when they move outside of their own personal experience of Jesus will they be able to continue to love him and know his love for them.

Jesus lived his life completely in God's love by following God's commandments. He was completely obedient. It was not a relationship that was private, that benefited just them. It was a public love, first revealed to the world in the Incarnation, then through the words and works of Jesus throughout his ministry. When Jesus glorified God, it was for the sake of the world, so that the world might believe, and come, and share the love of God

and Jesus.

The union of the believer with God, with Jesus, is not a private, mystical union with God or Jesus. Look at our lesson, and see where Jesus puts the emphasis: **v 21**. All of the “you”s in this passage are plural. You can’t tell that in English, but it’s obvious in the original Greek. **vv 15, 18-19**.

Because Jesus is addressing this Farewell Discourse to his Church, and how it is to operate after he’s gone, Jesus is speaking directly to us here this morning. His promises are made to the entire Christian community, beginning with the disciples and carrying forward to us. If we live in love, we are a mirror of that divine community: the Trinity.

Can the next generation, who never knew him, love him?

Imagine living in Jerusalem around 50AD. People who knew Jesus personally are still alive, still preaching and teaching. It would be so exciting to hear their stories. But, as the generations roll, eventually, they are all gone. And the people who knew them personally are all gone. What can we do to preserve the teachings correctly, before they get warped or garbled? Someone decided what they needed to do was write things down. That’s why we have a New Testament. The original apostles were all dead, and Jesus hadn’t come back yet. So, it now made sense to write down as much as we could remember. And the gospels were born.

Now, back to our question - can the generation who never knew Jesus personally still find some way to love him?

Yes, but only if that generation, and every generation since, models the life of love that Jesus lived for us. We must cultivate our relationship with Jesus. That relationship does not depend on the physical presence of Jesus. He will not be here in the sense that you and I are here.

The relationship depends entirely on the presence of the love of God in the life of the church. And, that love of God is present whenever those of us who love Jesus keep his commandments. **v 21**

Jesus spent his life showing us this love. He continued to show us through his suffering and death. We have the book. We have centuries upon centuries of living examples. We all personally know someone whose life exemplifies Jesus’ teaching, someone who was totally faithful to Jesus, trying their very best to live out the love they knew from Jesus. And that is what we must try

to do.

Without that divine love coursing through the veins of the living Church, there will be no Church. There may be a building, and there may be a group of people who gather there for whatever reason, but there will be no Christian community, no fellowship, no church.

The Church is always one generation away from extinction. Let's not let that happen on our watch. Let's take the fire from Jesus and the disciples and John Wesley and the founders of St. Matthias. And let's carry it out into the community, out into the world. It's a glorious and crucial calling. Let's leap into it as the angels leap when God speaks. We can see to it that God's "will is done on earth as it is in heaven." And that will is that we absorb the love God has for each one of us, and then share it with our church family, and beyond. That should be our very top priority as a church. Let's make sure it shapes us and makes us what we should be.