

In the passage we looked at last week, Jesus dropped a bomb on His disciples: “I am going away, and where I am going, you cannot come.” And if you believe, as the disciples had come to believe, that the world needs Jesus, this is bad news.

But then Jesus gave them a new commandment: “Love one another.” Even though He is going away, Jesus will still make His presence known on earth through the love of His disciples. His love carries on through them. Jesus is still here, in and through His people.

But the disciples are full of questions. Peter wants to come with Jesus, even though he isn't ready. Thomas is content to wait until it's time to come, but he doesn't where Jesus is going, or how to get there. When Jesus clarifies that He is going to the Father, Philip just wants one thing: “Show us the Father, and that's enough.”

John chapters 14-17 contain Jesus' teaching in response to these questions and concerns. The reason why Jesus spends so much time explaining things to his disciples is because they are troubled and afraid because Jesus is going where they cannot follow. And the heart of Jesus' teaching in these chapters, teaching that is meant to calm the fears of His disciples and give them peace, is high Trinitarian theology. When Jesus' followers are afraid, He calms them by teaching them about the Trinity. **What we often think of as the most difficult, challenging, and impractical doctrine of the Christian faith is Jesus' *first choice* to bring peace and comfort to His disciples.**

This is the big idea: **when you are afraid because you feel like God is leaving, or absent, or far away, Jesus reminds you that this cannot truly be the case for those who are taught by the Trinity.** To put it another way, whenever you ask the question “Where is God?” The Spirit, who is sent by the Father in the name of Jesus, says through the Word of God: “Here I am.” And where the Word of God is taught by the Spirit's power in the name of Jesus, whom the Father sent, God is there.

The primary application of this glorious truth is found in verse 27: Because the Triune God is always with you as you are taught from God's Word, you should not be troubled or afraid. Instead, by sending the Spirit to make God present to you through the Word, Jesus leaves you His peace. Christian, be at peace! If you love Jesus, you will keep His Word, and the Father will love you, and Father and Son will come to you, and make their home with you, through the teaching of the Holy Spirit. You are taught by the Trinity, so be at peace!

And this is what Jesus teaches His disciples: Even though Jesus is going away, He will come to His own, but in such a way that the world will not see Him. It will not be a bodily visible presence, but a different sort of presence. In verse 22, Judas (not the traitor, the other Judas)

wants to know what that means. “How can you come in such a way that you are with us, but not the world?”

Our passage today contains Jesus' answer, in three steps. Step one is in verse 23: **Love Jesus and keep His Word.** However Jesus is present, He is only present in this way to those who love Him, and those who love Jesus *will* keep His Word. “Keeping” Jesus' word shows up in two ways: first, *remembering*, and second, *obeying*. You need to remember what Jesus said, and you need to obey it. This is what it means to love Jesus. It's not enough to appreciate Him, and think happy thoughts when you remember Him. If you don't remember what He said, and if you aren't living the way He said to live, then you don't love Him.

This is why the next verse, 24, shows us that there is no category for loving Jesus and not keeping His Word. And by telling us that Jesus is not speaking on His own, but speaking the Father's Word, He ties this Trinitarian cord even tighter. His Jewish disciples cannot fall back on: “Oh, well, if Jesus is gone, at least we still have the Father.” When Jesus leaves, the answer is not to return back to Judaism as normal. Judaism as normal *ended* when the Father sent Jesus into the world. There is no going back. If you don't have Jesus, you don't have the Father either. Everything depends on your response to Jesus: if you do not love Him, you won't keep His Word, and since it is actually the Father's Word, you will lose both Father and Son.

But if you take step one, then God takes step two. In the second half of verse 23, we see that step two is taken by God, not by us. When we love Jesus and keep His Word, the Father returns our love, and Father and Son demonstrate that love by coming to make their home with us. Notice how on both sides, love is what makes the whole thing go. And so, in answer to Judas' question, the reason why the world does not experience the presence of Jesus is because there is no love that binds them together. It isn't because Jesus gives His disciples some sort of mysterious Jesus vision goggles; it's like asking why you don't get birthday presents from complete strangers: because they don't love you.

Also, this love results in *action*. We love Jesus, and *keep His word*. The Father loves us, and *comes to us*. Love that doesn't *do* anything isn't love. Many people will say, “Lord, Lord”, but since they didn't keep His Word, Jesus isn't fooled. They don't love Him.

Quick recap: Step one: our love *keeps*. Step two: God's love *comes*.

In verse 25, Jesus point out that these two steps have already been going on. They've gotten this far already. But when Jesus leaves, the disciples can still demonstrate their love for Him by continuing to keep His Word. The Father actually takes step 3 to make sure that step 2 continues so that step 1 will continue. Step 3, verse 26: God the Father sends God the Spirit in God

the Son's name. **Step one: love keeps. Step two: love comes. Step three: love sends.**

When Jesus goes, the Spirit comes and makes His home with us. What the Spirit *does* when He comes is to teach and remind God's people of Jesus' Word (which is really the Father's Word), so that they can keep keeping it! And as long as we keep doing step one, God takes step two by means of step three, which is what enables us to keep doing step one!

If you got lost there, think of it this way: The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us for a little while. When the flesh left, the Word stays among us by the Spirit. Look with me at John 6:63 – here, Jesus is talking about giving His flesh for His followers to eat so that they can live forever. But His hearers are confused: giving up the flesh means *death*, not life! And so in John 6:63 Jesus clarifies things: “It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.”

Yes, Jesus took on flesh for our sake, and yes, His flesh really was crucified for our sins, and yes, His flesh really was raised from the grave so that we could be made right with God. But what gave life to that flesh was the Spirit, and even when the flesh is gone, life comes through Spirit-filled words. And that life is the life of God Himself. The Spirit-filled Words that Jesus spoke connect you to the presence of God.

The great fear that the disciples had was that Jesus is leaving. But because of the deep unity of Father, Son, and Spirit, and because of the connection that we have with the Triune God through the Word, Jesus will always be present with us, through the Spirit, as the Spirit teaches you and reminds you of the Father's Word that He spoke through Jesus.

And so verse 27: Instead of fear, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” Not a fleshly gift like the world gives, but a spiritual gift. “So do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Verse 28: “You heard me say that I'm going away and that I would come to you.” I'm going away in the flesh; I'm coming to you in the Spirit. If the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not one God, then this makes no sense. Jesus would have to say, “I'm going away, and someone else is coming.” Which is only comforting if you *don't* love the one who is going away! But because of the unity of the Godhead, the Spirit is not *someone else* with *another* word, but rather the Spirit of God, speaking the same Word that Jesus spoke, which the Father gave Him to speak.

And so when Jesus leaves in the flesh, we don't lose God. And because God is three-in-one, we don't even lose Jesus. In His flesh, He goes where we cannot follow yet, but by His Spirit, He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Next Sunday is Ascension Sunday, where the Church celebrates the fact that Jesus' flesh ascended to the right hand of God, to receive glory and authority and a kingdom. In two weeks,

we celebrate Pentecost, marked by the sending of the Holy Spirit. If you understand today's text, then you understand that Ascension Sunday isn't "the day we lost Jesus". It's the day our king took the throne. Pentecost isn't "the day we replaced Jesus with a substitute." It's the day that everyone who loved Jesus and kept His Word was filled with the Spirit of Jesus.

We look back on these events, but as Jesus says in verse 29, He explained to His disciples before it happened, so that when it did happen, they would believe Him. And as we see in Acts 2, when the Spirit came in power on the Day of Pentecost, the disciples did believe, and as a result, they lost all of their fear. Their hearts were no longer troubled. Instead, in the power of the Spirit, out of love for Jesus, they filled the world with His Word.

And the lesson they learned when the Father sent the Spirit is the lesson for us, too: don't sit around waiting for the flesh of Jesus to return. Some Christians actually make this mistake, and think that we will never make an impact on the world since Jesus isn't here in the flesh. The world is getting worse and worse until Jesus comes back. But that's fear! That's the kind of theology that comes from a troubled heart!

Don't huddle together in an upper room until Jesus returns. Go out in the power of the Spirit and fill the world with the Word that Jesus gave you, the Word that the Father sent Him to give you, the Word that the Spirit teaches you. Keep this Word, the Word that you were taught by the Trinity, and God will love you, and come to you, and make His home with you.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*