

We Are Not Alone!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

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

During this time in the Gospel of John, Jesus is telling his Apostles that his time with them is coming to an end. They are in that upper room and they are having their last meal together. Jesus has told them of the events that are about to happen and Judas had just left to betray him. He said, “ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13: 34-35.)

These words remind us of when Jesus was speaking to Pharisees and Sadducees in (Matthew 22 :37-39) and they asked him what the greatest commandment was. He replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘ You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Just before COVID we had the anniversary of Martin Luther’s 99 thesis and our Adult Faith Formation studied the 10 commandments in the Large Catechism. It was very interesting and quite daunting. Some days we left dazed. I can’t believe it, but it was on May 3, 2009, I became a congregational deacon here at Trinity. Three years of monthly classes and yearly weekend getaways at Vanderkamp and they said I qualified to be a liturgical deacon. We studied the commandments and one of the teaching Pastors told us that we did not need to teach the Commandments. I was surprised, stunned and very amazed. We agree when we have children Baptized that we will teach them the Commandments. We read them in the Bible. I will soon be 66 and now I think I have an idea what he was trying to say. What do you think?

If you love me, keep my commandments. If we don't have to learn them? Then what went wrong with Adam and Eve? They sure did not listen to God and what he had planned for them. He should have been able to shake the dust off his sandals and clapped his hands together and said. Ah, my plan came together. People are marvelous. Instead he ended up with Us, Humans, Saints and Sinners. He had to send His Son to save us. What a burden Jesus was given. In such a short time he came to teach us all he could about having a loveing relationship with His Father who created us and who promised he would always love us and never abandon us.

So have you come up with an answer? Jesus asked God to give us another Advocate. We are not alone. All through this season of Easter we celebrate our Baptism. We receive the Holy Spirit , that seed and connection to our Father and to our Savior Jesus Christ when we are baptized. The Advocate is there with us every step of our lives and we hear him when we pray and study the word, we taste and sense him in Holy Communion. He is there in the new commandment " love one another as I have loved you.

Why is this not easy? If you love me follow my commandment! Jesus summed it up so easily, so simply. Love. Why is the world so hard? Why is the world so broken?

That is why God sent his Son. To restore the relationship between God and us and the relationships that we have each other.

We all have different lives. Here you sit before me, before God. Some of you will be watching on Zoom or YouTube, or Facebook. Maybe today or sometime during the week. We all have one thing in common, the desire to sit for a moment and hear the word of God. To possibly partake in communion, or to have your sins forgiven, known and unknown. Then we leave and go our to our separate lives. We go to our homes, families and careers. Perhaps you may go homeless shelter or maybe a tent under a bridge, or a vacant apartment building. Some may go home to an empty apartment or to a second job so that a meal can be put on their table.

No one may know what your life is really like when you leave here. Maybe no one asks, or you don't tell anyone the truth because you think no one will really care. Perhaps you are a person who doesn't ask because then you may have to care or get involved. I think there are many broken lives and broken relationships that have become more pronounced. There is more loneliness, more fear, more hate, less forgiveness, and less compassion in this world than I have ever witnessed before.

Last week Patsy reminded us that we are to do God's works here as his disciples. I know, as Lutherans we don't believe that good works will save us. Luther reminds us that doing good works is a response to what God has already done for us. Jesus was crucified, died, and rose again for us. Once, so all our sins would be forgiven. We do not need to earn a place, it is freely given. It is impossible to separate work from faith, quite as impossible to separate heat and light from fire. So I remind you again, "If you love me , keep my commandments."

Love one another as I have loved you. When we do this , we no longer just concentrate on ourselves. We look at the people around us and see what is going on in the world. What is happening to other people, to friends, to the environment, to the oppressed, and the stranger. When we turn our view outward it isn't easy. It makes us look at the good , the bad and the ugly. It also lets us see countless blessings, not just the brokenness. By looking outward you may feel the need to seek God's forgiveness or forgiveness from another person. It may bring you joy or it may bring you to tears. You may help someone else carry a burden too heavy for them to bear. You may share a gift of yourself or teach someone else something important. You may even create a new relationship or forge a stronger relationship with God. Step by Step we can help heal the brokenness in our world.

You must remember that You are not alone. Jesus left us with an Advocate. " I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever. Jesus asks things of us but he does not make us walk all

alone. I think most people have the desire to do what is right. The Holy Spirit is there with us in this broken world to help us follow the path that Jesus has called us to walk with him. Luther said this and he said it wonderfully. "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts and made me holy and kept me in true faith." The Holy Spirit works through us and in us. We call on his name and we receive the fruits of the spirit. The Holy Spirit will give us love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control when you call on him. How many of you when you have been put in a bad situation have called upon his name and received one of these gifts from the Holy Spirit. We are not alone.

We struggle to understand a love that is so deep. A love that we know we do not deserve. Jesus said, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. When we understand and grasp the love God has for us, How can we not be inspired to love our neighbor.

So, My response to the question I posed to you earlier. Do we need to teach the ten commandments? I am of the opinion that through the Holy Spirit we are introduced to the love of God that is so deep that we will follow the greatest commandment. Love each other as I have loved you!

Go in peace and joy, knowing that you have the received greatest love of all.

Amen