

**“Because We Love Our Living Lord”**

How horrible things had become! Adam could still remember the way things used to be. He could think of the brief time when he and Eve lived together in perfect harmony and perfect love. In a word it was paradise. But now he looked down at the murdered body of his son, Abel. He realized that another son, Cain, had committed this atrocity. His heart ached, not only at the loss of his dear son, but also at the depths to which his family had sunk, so far from what he had once known.

Now, in fairness, I can't begin to imagine what Adam went through. I don't know how he learned about the events recorded in our First Lesson this morning. But that lesson show us so clearly how sin destroyed a perfect world. Right after Adam and Eve sinned, it was clear that their relationship had changed drastically. But the account of Cain and Abel shows us how drastic the effects of sin were. Only one generation removed from a perfect creation, we find one brother murdering another. We find the very definition of hatred so quickly after witnessing a world of perfect love.

And so in our Second Lesson we read how Cain and Abel represent two sides, two alternatives. God would have us live like Abel, willingly and joyfully following his decrees, but all around us is murder and hatred like that of Cain. And we, too, are tempted to be jealous and vengeful, and to allow the works of the evil one to take root in our own lives. God calls us to love others, and we obey his call because we love our living Lord.

It is our living Lord who addresses us in the words of this morning's sermon text, today's Gospel. He tells us what our love for him looks like, and he promises to strengthen us to show love to him and to those around us.

Jesus first spoke these words to his disciples on Maundy Thursday, the night that he was betrayed and arrested. While they celebrated the Passover together, Jesus continued to teach his disciples many things. Prior to our sermon text, Jesus had spoken to them about heaven and how he was going to prepare a place for them there. To remove any confusion, Jesus explained that he is the way, the truth, and the life, and that he is the only way to heaven.

But Jesus had more to teach because his disciples weren't in heaven yet. They would have to wait to get there. They would still be living in this world. And therefore Jesus instructed them about living their lives as his followers. **“If you love me, you will obey what I command,”** he said.

Now Jesus has commanded many things. We can summarize his commands with the command he gave them on that Maundy Thursday evening, to love one another, following the example of his love. Jesus calls on his followers to be self-sacrificing, to be kind, to be generous, and to be caring. Throughout his ministry he gave specific examples of how people would carry this out, and he modeled that attitude in his life. And one of the greatest ways that followers of Jesus carry out his commands is by sharing his Word with others, that Word which directs them to the Savior.

If we're not careful, it would be easy to take these words out of context. We could hear Jesus' call to obey his commands and turn it into the way to salvation. It is natural for people to look to their own works and merits and expect to be rewarded for them. So it is worth reminding ourselves that Jesus shared these words with believers. They already know that Jesus is the way to heaven. They had already learned that their sins were forgiven because of his work. It is not because we love the Lord that we are saved, but because he loved us. Because he loves us, we love in return. And because we love him, we show love to others.

And Jesus goes on to promise his help in a very special way. He says, **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he**

**lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**" Jesus was preparing his disciples for what was coming. They would see his suffering and death. They would witness his resurrection, and then they would see him ascend into heaven, at which time they would no longer see him. But he would still be with them. He would be with them because he would send the Holy Spirit. And he himself would be with them.

Jesus went on to explain: **"Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live."** Only by faith would the disciples know that their living Lord was with them. The world wouldn't see Jesus, but his followers would.

With these promises, Jesus was anticipating the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, but the promises reassure us today as well. Jesus sends us his Holy Spirit through the water and the Word in Holy Baptism, through the precious words of his gospel, and through the special meal of Holy Communion. And so even though the world around us may not see it or know it, we know that our Savior himself lives with us and that his Holy Spirit is strengthening us to serve him. And Jesus has proven his promises true by his resurrection from the dead. He is our living Lord and we will live with him forever. Because we love our living Lord, we have this confidence.

And Jesus further encourages us by comparing his dwelling with us to his relationship with the heavenly Father. He says, **"On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."** Earlier, Jesus' disciples had asked him to show the Father to them. He answered that he was one with the Father, just as he says here that he is in the Father. The union of the persons in the Holy Trinity is beyond our comprehension, but it offers us this comfort: that the God who created us and loves us has shown himself to us, fully, in Jesus Christ. And just as the Father and Son are united, so Jesus unites us to himself through faith. All that he has done for us is our very own because he is in us, and we are in him.

And because we love our living Lord, we obey his commands. Jesus returns to this point to emphasize that this the way that we live Christian lives: by obeying the commands that God has given to us in his Word. It pleases God when we follow his commands.

It pleases God when we make hearing and learning his Word a priority. It pleases God when we share his Word with others. It pleases God when we respect his gift of marriage and uphold it as he intended, when we protect the reputations of others instead of tearing them down, and when we help others in need. And it pleases God when we do these things because we love our living Lord.

As we read in Genesis 4, Abel brought the best of his flocks as an offering to the Lord. Because he loved God, he honored him with his action. Cain's actions looked similar on the outside. He brought some of his harvest to offer it to the Lord. But there was a big difference. Cain did it, perhaps out of obligation, perhaps just for show, but he did it without true love for God. Because Abel loved the Lord, we have confidence that he lives in heaven today. He hadn't yet seen Jesus. He hadn't found the fulfillment of God's promises yet. But he trusted and he loved.

We stand at the opposite extreme of salvation history. We haven't seen Jesus with our own eyes or heard him speak to us the way his disciples once did. But we have their eyewitness accounts of his death for our sins and his resurrection to life again. And we have his promise repeated to us: **"Because I live, you also will live."** And we will listen to his commands and we will obey them, because we love our living Lord.

The Text: John 14:15–21 (NIV84)

<sup>15</sup> “If you love me, you will obey what I command. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”