

Preacher: **Pastor Twyla**

Scripture: **John 14:15-21**

*¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ 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.** ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”*

I lost both of my grandfather’s when I was very young. My Grandpa King died from a massive heart attack when he was 54. I was about 8 years old. Grandpa Kover died from congestive heart failure a year later, almost to the day. He was 60 and I was about 9 years old. Since I was so young, I didn’t have a lot of years to get to know them. So, unfortunately, I don’t remember them very well.

The one thing I remember about Grandpa King is his large, calloused hands. He was a hard-working Amish farmer. Although I had many more opportunities to be with my Grandpa Kover, I remember little about him, too. I remember the car he drove, and I remember riding somewhere with my grandparents in that car. But mostly what I remember is him being sick in bed one holiday when the family was at my grandparents’ home. Also, I remember clearly the day he died. He was in the hospital. Mom and I were visiting with my grandmother at her house when she got the call from the hospital telling us he had died.

I cherish my family and so, it’s kind of unnerving for me that I cannot remember them very well. When we lose someone we love, it is common to fear that we will forget our loved one. Although we know they live on in a wonderful and special place prepared for them in the presence of God, and one day we will be with them again, we want to hold on to something-of-them in this lifetime. We loved them and our lives were intimately intertwined.

So as a comfort and a way of keeping their memory alive, we might keep things around us like pictures or sentimental momentos, or we might visit places or do things we used to do with our loved one, or we might write down memories or tell stories about them to remind us of them and our love for them.

I found myself thinking about these things as I approached today’s scripture. The text from John takes place after the Lord’s Supper and Jesus was talking to his disciples, once again, about his impending death. We can only imagine how unsettling it must have been for the disciples to hear Jesus talk about this. Jesus knew the disciples did not understand.

Jesus was sensitive to the sadness and fear, the growing anxiety and confusion that the disciples felt as a result of all of his talk about his leaving them. Jesus was the leader of their group, he was their teacher; but even more, he had become their friend. This talk about the approaching time of his suffering and death troubled for them. If what Jesus was saying was true, then what would become of them?

That’s why Jesus revealed more of God’s plans for them for their future. He tried to comfort them by assuring them that, though he would not be there with them in the physical sense any longer, they would not be alone. He would always remain with them, not only in memory, but through a special Holy presence, along with God and himself. Jesus told them that God would send an Advocate, a Comforter, a Counselor, the Spirit of Truth, The Holy Spirit, who would be with them forever after he is gone. The Spirit would bring to them the presence of God in a way like never before.

One can only imagine what the disciples were thinking in response to this announcement. The concept of a Holy Spirit was a mystery to them. But we know that it would not be long after this that the disciples did indeed receive the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They found that, just as Jesus said, they were not alone. They didn't need to worry about losing their memories of Jesus and his teachings, even as they eventually carried on Christ's mission to the world. They eventually discovered that Jesus was still present with them through the Spirit.

But before that time arrived, Jesus tried to assure the disciples that they will know the Spirit is with them, even though those living apart from him and God, will not know the Spirit because they cannot see the Spirit. Jesus told them that only those who love him and who obey his commands will know and see the Spirit. **Jesus teaches this same truth to us, and he says that the evidence of our genuine love for him is through our obedience. The two are intertwined.**

I may have shared this illustration before, but I like it and it drives home a major lesson in this text. Imagine, if you will, that you work for a company whose president found it necessary to travel out of the country and spend an extended period of time abroad. So he says to you and the other trusted employees, "Look, I'm going to leave. And while I'm gone, I want you to pay close attention to the business. You manage things while I'm away. I will write to you regularly. When I do, I will instruct you in what you should do from now until I return from this trip." Everyone agrees.

He leaves and stays gone for a couple of years. During that time, he writes often, communicating his desires and concerns. Finally, he returns. He walks up to the front door of the company and immediately discovers everything is in a mess--weeds flourishing in the flower beds, windows broken across the front of the building, the gal at the front desk dozing, loud music roaring from several offices, two or three people engaged in horseplay in the back room. Instead of making a profit, the business has suffered a great loss. Without hesitation he calls everyone together and with a frown asks, "What happened? Didn't you get my letters?"

You say, "Oh, yeah, sure. We got all your letters. We've even bound them in a book. And some of us have memorized them. In fact, we have 'letter study' every Sunday. You know, those were really great letters." I think the president would then ask, "But what did you do about my instructions?" And, no doubt the employees would respond, "Do? Well, nothing. But we read every one!"

Jesus said that his followers show their love for him by obeying him. Love is more than lovely words; it is commitment and conduct. It is study of God's Word and obedience to what the Word teaches us.

Now remember, the scripture tells us that Jesus also said that those who live as though God does not exist, those who do not Love God and do not obey God's commands, they will not recognize the Spirit. This means that the Spirit does not force itself on anyone, the Spirit is not a gate crasher into our hearts, the Spirit does not go where it is not recognized. The Spirit waits to be received.

Jesus said that the Spirit that would come to them, and to all who welcome the Spirit, not only as a presence surrounding them, but also as the Spirit living in and through them. The relationship Christians have with the Holy Spirit is very intimate, so intimate that we see and feel evidence of the living Spirit in and through us. This Holy presence changes us and shapes us. It is a powerful presence that influences our words and actions in ways that brings glory and honor to our God; and spreads His undying love with others.

God knows that we need both his voice and his touch. So, he gave us not only the Word, but also his Son. He gave us not only his Son, Jesus Christ, but also his body, the church, and he gave us the Holy Spirit, God's voice and touch that says, "I love you, and I am with you."

May 14, 2023 - The Spirit of Truth

On June 12, 1979, a young man-made aviation history when he flew a pedal-powered plane across the English Channel. Taking off from England, he flew for three hours, rarely more than fifteen feet above water. Finally, after covering twenty-two miles, he landed exhausted on the coast of France. As dramatic as this was, man-powered flight will never be practical. A man simply cannot maintain the necessary energy output for extended flights.

In the same way, no one can live the Christian life pedaling on his or her own power. It is only through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit that we can consistently live the Christian life.

The Holy Spirit is always with us, even though we may not see the Spirit every single moment of every day. The Holy Spirit is there as our Comforter, our Advocate, our Counselor, and Guide. The Holy Spirit is there feeding us the truth that we are one of God's blessed and loved children, and empowering us to live in that truth. Amen.