

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**John 14:15-21, “Love in Action”**  
**by Pastor Matt Johnson, 5/21/2017**

When my garden’s pepper, tomato, and chard plants are watered, fertilized,  
and frequently exposed to sunshine,  
they will grow and produce peppers and tomatoes and leafy greens  
for a delicious garden salad. Amen? Amen!

I’ll say that again:

**When** my garden’s pepper, tomato, and chard plants are watered, fertilized,  
and frequently exposed to sunshine,  
**they will** grow and produce peppers and tomatoes and leafy greens  
for a delicious garden salad.

In saying all of this, I wonder if I’ve placed a burden upon my plants.

Let’s take a poll:

- Who thinks I’m being presumptuous or burdensome to my garden plants?
- Who thinks I’ve simply described the basic way that things work under normal conditions and the plants can expect things to go as I described?

Oh, good, we’re in agreement!

That’s really wonderful news.

This means that you already understand John 14:15-21. Congratulations.  
Really, excellent work this morning.

Okay, there might be a few more things to work out,  
but you understand, at least, the kind of statement Jesus is making.  
In the biggest picture, Jesus is describing the ordinary ways  
that discipleship works in the era after he is gone.

To help us stay on the same page,

I made an outline of the passage that should help a little bit visually  
so that we don’t get too lost in the details.

## John 14:15-21 “Love in Action”

v. 15-16:

loving Jesus → keeping commands → Father sending “Spirit of Truth”

Four Implications of Life with the Spirit of Truth:

v. 17: The world doesn't get the Spirit

v. 17: But the Spirit will get into you all

v. 18: You will not be alone.

v. 19-20: You will share in the divine circle of life.

v. 21:

keeping commands → loving Jesus → being loved by the Father / Jesus

Sounds complicated. Why should we bother unpacking all of this?

Because Jesus is preparing the disciples for what the normal expectations should be following his death and resurrection, which is to say, the era we're living in right now.

This is a sermon on discipleship from Jesus intended for our own times.

Personally, I'm pretty interested in what Jesus says about these things, so let's unpack these verses and see what we find.

**V. 15-16: Loving Jesus → keeping commands → the Father sending “the Spirit of Truth”**

**14:15, “If you love me, keep my commands.”**

“If you love me,” is a common way of translating the first phrase of this verse, but it can easily send us down the tracks of conditional rewards.

This sounds like the kind of “if-then” motivation that we tell our young people to run away from in their dating relationships.

“If you really love me, then you’ll do this for me.” Right?

That’s a pretty manipulative and dysfunctional way of operating,  
and it’s not the basis for a strong, healthy relationship.

So why would Jesus say this?

Do we really have to prove ourselves to Jesus by our obedience?

Augustine, the 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian, read this passage and asked,

“How can we love so as to receive Him,  
without whom we cannot love at all?

Or how shall we keep the commandments so as to receive Him,  
without whom we have no power to keep the commandments?”

How indeed?

Well, I hate to bore you with technical details,

but there are two translation issues could be part of the problem.

To begin with, the initial word does not need to be “if”

but can also be rendered, “when.”

This opens up the possible phrase, “When you love me.”

Secondly, the verb, “keep” is not in the commanding imperative  
(which is how the NIV reads), but in the future tense.

Putting these factors together, Dale Bruner translates the verse as follows:

*“When you love me, you will be keeping these commands of mine.”*

REPEAT.

If we accept Bruner’s translation, we still have to ask ourselves, what commands?

I think Jesus is referencing two specific commands that he has mentioned  
in this same block of teaching.

First, in 13:34, Jesus says, “**A new command I give you: love one another.**

**As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”**

A few verses later in 14:1, Jesus says, “**You believe in God, believe also in me.**”

That’s a second command.

So Jesus is saying, “When you love me you will also 1) love each other  
(Command #1 from 13:34) and 2) believe in me (Command #2 from 14:1).”

What a difference! Gone are the overtones of a manipulative, conditional  
relationship offered by an abusive spouse or parent or friend.

This is not an ultimatum, but a gracious illustration  
of what love looks like in action.

Now you can see why I started with a poll about my garden plants.

Remember? When I water them, fertilize them, and expose them to sun,  
they will produce good things.

This is the same concept I hear Jesus saying.

“When you love me you will keep my commandments.”

He’s simply showing the natural connection

between love and obedient action. They are naturally correlated.

How is it that our love for Jesus will so naturally result in obedience?

Through the arrival of “another counsellor to help you.”

That completes the verse:

“When you love me you will keep these commands of mine;  
and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate  
to help you—the Spirit of Truth.”

**ILLUSTRATION:**

Imagine yourself standing alone on the floor of an ancient court.

Seated above you is the judge and your accusers. Others watch from the sides.

Armed guards stand ready to remove you  
to a cell from which there is no escape.

You need help. You need someone to come alongside you and stand with you,  
to give you what is needed to make it through this trial and be vindicated.

Who can you call?

In ancient Rome the person you would want is called a *paraklete*.

“Para” means alongside, and “klete” means called.

Paraklete is, “The one who is called alongside.”

The paraklete of the ancient world was known as a trusted advocate,  
called alongside to assist in time of great need.

In rabbinic writings the word is used to describe

"a friend of the accused person, called to speak to his character,  
or otherwise enlist sympathy in his favor.”

In yet another use the rabbis taught that, when standing before God,  
a person’s good works could function as *parakletes* –  
advocates for your case before the divine judge.

This is the word Jesus uses to describe the one he will ask the Father to send.

Translations in English include “the Advocate,” “the Helper,” “the Counselor,”  
“the Comforter,” “the Encourager,” and “the True Friend.”

Martin Luther’s German translation was, “der Tröster” (the Truster).

It’s very important to recognize that Jesus says he will ask the Father  
and the Father will give you *another* Advocate.

Another.

Which means that the disciples have already been sent one advocate!

Implicitly, the first one is Jesus.

And so the second one will be *another one* like him.

The deep connection between Jesus, the Spirit that will be sent,  
and the Father who sent them both is highlighted throughout  
the book of John.

So a summary of our top bar could be:

Our loving obedience and belief in Jesus

is guided and encouraged by God’s Advocate – the Spirit of Truth.

We now move into the middle box. Jesus does a deep dive that reveals four implications about life with the Spirit of Truth.

### **#1 The World doesn't get the Spirit**

Jesus says that “The world cannot accept him [that is, the Spirit of Truth] because it neither sees him nor knows him.”

Humanity organizing itself apart from God has its own kind of truth.

This is not terribly difficult to discern in our own headlines today.

What is fact, what is not, what has happened, what has not happened, what do we see, what do we not see

– all these things are spun one direction or another, but certainly not in the direction of truth.

In such an atmosphere it's impossible for the Spirit of Truth to be received, because the Spirit is not recognizable.

The experience of the disciples is just the opposite:

### **#2 The Spirit will get into you all**

**“But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”**

Proving that Jesus was from the South, he uses the 2<sup>nd</sup> plural, otherwise known as, “y'all.”

For the Spirit of Truth lives with y'all, and will be in y'all.

Here Jesus predicts the indwelling of the Spirit after he returns to heaven, but the promise is for a communal indwelling, not just an individual one.

### **#3 Y'all will not be alone**

Rather than leaving them as orphans, Jesus will come to them through the Spirit's presence. In this way, Jesus will remain “visible” to them even though the world does not see him any longer. This is because the world does not accept the encouragement of the Spirit of Truth.

We have the beginnings of Trinitarian theology here in that Jesus is implying that wherever the Spirit is, he is also.

#### **#4 You will share in the divine circle of life**

The last implication of life with this other Advocate / Encourager is that the disciples will begin to realize the interplay of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Spirit of Truth in the life of the church.

[Illustrate with Tupperware!]

You (church), Spirit in you, Jesus in Father, you in Jesus, Jesus in you...

This is what love in action looks like:

a big stack of Tupperware.

Or perhaps a bit more nicely:

a living tapestry of beings sharing in the divine life together.

**The bottom bar on our outline resembles the top bar in many ways, except that the order is reversed:**

In v. 15 we began with love and moved to keeping commands.

In v. 21 we begin with keeping commands and move to love.

The result is that anyone who loves Jesus is loved by God the Father as well as Jesus.

This is not stagnant love, selfish love, isolated or one dimensional love.

This is love that moves, that connects, that shares,

that is open and free-flowing – love that begins with Jesus,

is encouraged by the Spirit and reinforced by the Father.

Bruner, “When we hear Jesus saying to every one of us who wants to be a real Christian, ‘Let’s be friends, and I promise to become more and more real to you,’ I think we have understood our text.”

So – Love Jesus! When you are loving him, you will also keep his commands.

Day by day you will be drawn deeper into the eternal dance of God.