

## If You Love Me....

My boys growing up, love to go to the store and get “something.” They might be prone to say...”If you love me, you will buy me that this Power Ranger.” Or as a teenager, “If you love me, you let me drive the car this evening.” This “if you love me” phrase as teenager or young adults can often be dangerous, because it can lead to might lead to unwanted or unplanned sexual activity... “If you love me, you will show me” We too as parents use this phrase as a way to get our children to do what we want... “If you love me, you will behave while we go grocery shopping and not embarrass me. “If You Love Me...These are powerful words.. They can conjure up emotions of guilt, of manipulation, but also of obedience. Not always in a good way when we use these to manipulate people into doing something they shouldn’t. But these words are the opening lines of our scripture today.... “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Jesus in John’s gospel lesson today is with the disciples during that last meal. They had the foot washing, talked about Jesus’ impending death, and that he has prepared a place for them. The discussion in last week’s lesson was when Phillip ask “Show us the father? Jesus replies “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?...Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” As in the popcorn lesson last week

you have the popcorn seed and the popped corn--you have the same thing in two different forms... It is like that with Jesus and God... Which brings us today's lesson.

That opening line... "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." What commandments is he talking about? Those of Moses? He is referring to the great commandment—to love God with all your heart soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Okay, so those disciples might be a little dizzy by now. Jesus has told them that he will be leaving them soon. He is in His father and his father is in him. He is going away and what he wants them to do, is like a parent to a child...he poses that "If you love me... statement. In the NIV version, the verse says "If you love me, you will obey what I command." That is a little stronger than the language of the NRSV that we listened to earlier... you will obey what I command... This is a pretty forceful Jesus here. Not one that is setting forth God's grace and mercy to everyone, but is setting forth a guide for obedience...But while that second part of the phrase is kind of scary, Are we missing the first part of the phrase... "If you love me" So, Jesus is asking the disciples for obedience through this love for Him. But how will they be able to do this without Jesus?

Taking this opening statement, and putting it in context with the rest of the scripture, we go on to find that Jesus will not make them do this alone. He says that “I will ask my father and he will send you another Advocate to be with you forever. The spirit of truth...” The Greek word is “paracletos” which means “Advocate” “Counselor” and “Comforter.” This advocate will dwell in them and reside in them and act as Jesus did himself.

(Shearman, 4) He will send this spirit to reside in them. He goes on to say “I will not leave you orphaned: I am coming to you. In a little while you will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you will also live” He goes on in this discourse to reveal that of the resurrection that will occur.

John Shearman writes. “Perhaps verse 18-19 contain the most astonishing claim of all in this reading. It rings triumphantly across the gravesite of every believer giving hope in the deepest shadows of death. The reference is to the resurrection. However, it does not mean the physical resuscitation of the mortal body, but the resurrection of both Jesus and those who believe in him to an entirely different life.”

So we have this opening statement of “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” then this promise that you don’t have to do it alone.. “I will send an advocate” followed by this promise of resurrection through His believers...Wow! What an awesome passage...But one that does come with

challenges...What does that mean for us? What message do we take from this today?

“If You Love Me...” How do we love Jesus? We talk about how Jesus loves me.. But how do we love Jesus? We could be a church with a big praise and worship time each Sunday that stand up here and sing songs praising God and Jesus focusing on the personal “I” factor just like many of these contemporary or mega churches do. I’ll admit on Sunday mornings I listen to praise and worship music on my way into church to get me focused for the day. There are those bumper stickers that say “Honk if you love Jesus” and I guess anybody can honk...I read somewhere the other day that said, anybody can honk, it might be better witness.. “Feed the Poor if you love Jesus.” Our day and time are full of folks witnessing Jesus to those in our community. The popular “Have you been saved?” or “Do you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?” are popular ways to evangelize and prosalitize. But is that they way we want to witness to how we love Jesus to others with a “turn before you burn” theology or do we want to witness how we love Christ through actions and obedience to his commandments. He is telling us here, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. How do we love Jesus? Through this obedience of loving

God with our heart, soul, strength, and mind and loving our neighbor as our self, we are showing our love of Jesus.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” How does this apply to the church community? I was watching Bill Moyer’s interview with Rev. Jeremiah Wright on TV Friday evening. One of the things that really spoke to me the most, didn’t center around the controversial sound bytes of his sermons, but what he said about how his ministry was built in the Southside Chicago Community. Jeremiah Wright says in talking about taking on this small church of 87 folks in Southside Chicago, Wright says to Moyer: “..a good friend of yours, I believe, and one of my professors, got me into the predicament I’m in today, Dr. Martin Marty, one of my professors at the University of Chicago... He put a challenge to us in 1970, late ’69, early ’70, I’ll never forget. He said “You know, you come into the average church on Sunday morning and you think you’ve stepped from the real world into a fantasy world. And what do I mean by that?” He said pick up the church bulletin. You leave a world, Vietnam, or today you leave a world, Iraq, over 4000 dead, American boys and girls, 100,000, 200,000 depending on which count Iraqi dead. Afghanistan, Darfur, rapes in the Congo, Katrina, Lower Ninth Ward, that the world you leave. And you come in: you pick up you church bulletin, it says there is a ladies tea on second Sunday. The

children's choir will be singing. He said "How come our bulletins, how come our faith preached in our churches does not relate to the world in which our church members live at the benedictions?...Wright goes on to explain that when the Trinity United Church of Christ looked a candidate that they looked for someone who could take the message to the community. They asked can you lead us into this new direction? How do we minister to the community into which we sit? .. and he was chosen as that candidate in 1973. The church is 9000 strong. So I pose the question what does this command of Jesus, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments look like in our church community? How does Elon Community UCC show they love Jesus and are keeping this commandment? Think about it a minute. I think that if I stopped and polled the crowd here today, we could quickly come up with several ways we are showing our love to this community—the bringing over of the Burmese family and working to integrate them into our community. Our work with Family Abuse Services..just this month I had an opportunity to have Pam Thompson speak to my circle group from First Christian, and was really proud when she bragged on what a great support Elon Community had been to their agency. We feed the folks at the homeless shelter once a month. Betsy Stevens weekly trek to the Food Lion to pick up food for our meal or to take to the Piedmont Mission. Ellie

Ketcham and those who help with Special Fridays...this is a great way to minister to these young people and to these families. If you have not had an opportunity to experience Special Fridays, I invite you to come one Friday night. The love of those children and the love the adult and college volunteers have will bring tears to your eyes. The recent collection for the Heifer Project brought in over \$1000 to help with plants and animals for those in need. We have Ray and Gayle Pollard right there right now. This is a church showing they love Jesus and are keeping his commandments. But is there more to be done? We sit in a college community. Are we doing all we can to reach out to the young people that are sitting just across the street? How can we reach out more to show the love of Christ in the community in which we sit? Our new building will be a good asset in bringing new types of services into this church that might be more appealing to these young people. With our youth, it has been a few years since they have been on a mission trip. That will be in the works for 2009 and I am going to look for some additional mission opportunities for these youth to be involved with those in need for our community this year.

So I challenge you as members of this church community to be ones who obey the command "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

Do we do it alone? No, we have an Advocate, a Counselor, a Comforter that has been sent to abide in us. This passage calls the advocate a Spirit of Truth. That spirit abides within us and guides us to do what we are called to do “keeping the commandments. I found a great example of this that I would like to share in closing. It is from an article called, “What We can Learn From Dogs” by Rev. Dr. Wesley Taylor of Tualatin United Methodist Church in Tualatin, Oregon. The article starts off by saying : Jesus did not leave his disciples without providing guidance for living in a world of hostility and fear. What he taught us is not only reinforced by Scripture, but by simply looking around us—even in a family pet.

“The patient, whom we’ll call Hazel, entered UCLA Medical Center for quadruple bypass surgery. Since being moved into ICU, she had barely moved, or even opened her eyes. It had been days now, and volunteer Betty Walsh was getting concerned. The situation was getting desperate. She decided to call in a member of the canine candy-stripping corps.

The new staffer, a pet-partner, if you will, arrived moments later. Koyla, a 145 pound shaggy great white Pyrenees, crawled right up on Hazel’s hospital bed and snuggled beside her. There she lay beside her patient, nuzzling her warm and furry body in next to Hazel, who hadn’t

twitched a muscle for days. Betty and the other nurses gathered around to watch, tense and concerned.

Then they detected movement. Hazel's hand came alive. It wasn't long until her hand was inching toward the dog. She began to stroke its fur. Within minutes, she was smiling and talking, calling the huge dog her friend.

Betty stood close by to monitor her vital signs. The blood pressure monitor began to go down, down, down to normal levels.

Koyla is not the only dog in the corps. There's a poodle, greyhound, a pug, eight golden retrievers, four black labs, two German shepherds, several mutts—and a partridge in a pear tree.” The article goes on to say “What is it about dogs that evokes such a positive response? ...dogs demonstrate loyalty and obedience and offer comfort and a sense of well-being.

“The point? Perhaps we should try a little harder to be godly and dogly in our daily lives. The marks of godly/dogly disciples are clearly enumerated in the text “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” ...If we were to have the kind of ministry in our churches, homes, schools, and communities that pet partners have in hospitals what would that look like? What would faithful obedience to the will of God, and the willingness to “come” to the side of other as their Advocate mean in the lives of those

around us? Dr. Taylor leaves us with 10 dog truths that will help us in this quest:

1. Greet loved ones with wagging tail. Nothing is more important than feeling loved, and there's no creature on the planet that does it better than a dog. The wagging tail affirms that this is where we belong: This is our home, where we live, where we're safe and where we're loved.
2. Eat with gusto and enthusiasm. You know how dogs eat: slobber flying everywhere, and licking the dish clean until every last scent of gravy is gone. Dogs know that eating is a celebration of life. Breaking bread together is holy. To nourish the body is not a chore, but a sacrament. Animosities are dissipated at meals, barriers broken down, friendships renewed and strengthened. So, eat with gusto. Enjoy all the flavors and spices of creation.
3. On hot days, drink lots of water and lie under a shady tree. Relax, slow down and enjoy. Give yourself a time out. Opt out, unplug, and get lazy.
4. Run, romp and play daily. Physical exercise is as important for the soul as it is for the body. No disciple of Christ can be as faithful and effective when the body is run down and health is unnecessarily poor.

When we learn how to play and stretch and get in some exercise we'll feel better from the inside out.

5. Be loyal. Loyalty is a good thing, and if your dog is nothing else, he is loyal to fault. Loyalty has fallen on hard times. Loyalty is a critical element of discipleship, for it speaks to our relationship with others: our spouse, our vocation, our community and our friends.

6. When you're happy, dance around and wag your tail. Thankfulness and celebration are powerful dynamics for successful and healthy living. Gratitude is a gift we give ourselves that enables us to affirm the essential goodness of life. Even when adversity strikes, gratitude helps us maintain our perspective and carries us through the low moments.

7. If someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by and nuzzle gently. We all have bad days. That's why we need encouragement and affirmation. When we are depressed, we know that it takes only a quiet word, a gentle touch to bring us around. A dog has this instinct that tells it when to be dancing and jumping around and when to just be there beside you. Words are not always needed, or even helpful, to convey empathy. A gentle nuzzle will do.

8. No matter how harshly you're scolded, don't pout - run back and

make friends. Carrying grudges makes life a drudgery. Make friends and keep them. Overlook faults and assume the best. Don't keep a scorecard of rights and wrongs. Don't take offense.

9. Avoid biting when a simple growl will do. We do not need to injure others by what we say or do. We can be strong with love; firm with kindness.

10. Bark with your buddies. Barking is an act of commonality.

Barking says we belong in this together. We are one.

So I ask you are you ready for the challenge...are you ready to be godly/dogly? Because we remember today that Jesus has taught us "If you love me, you will keep my commandments"...Go from this place ready to meet that challenge and obey that commandment.