

Green Hill Presbyterian Church  
“Do You Love Me?”  
Thomas G. Speers, III  
Easter 6—May 21, 2017

Lessons: Acts 17:22-31; John 14:15-21.

There is a wonderful song in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* where Tevya asks his wife Golde, “do you love me?” “Do I what?” “Do you love me?” “Do I love you? With our daughters getting married And this trouble in the town You're upset, you're worn out Go inside, go lie down! Maybe it's indigestion.” “Golde I'm asking you a question...Do you love me?” “You're a fool.” “I know...But do you love me?” “Do I love you? For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes, Cooked your meals, cleaned your house, Given you children, milked the cow. After twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?” “Golde, The first time I met you Was on our wedding day I was scared.” “I was shy.” “I was nervous.” “So was I.” “But my father and my mother Said we'd learn to love each other And now I'm asking, Golde Do you love me?” “I'm your wife.” “I know...But do you love me?” “Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him, Fought him, starved with him. Twenty-five years my bed is his If that's not love, what is?” “Then you love me?” “I suppose I do.” “And I suppose I love you too.” And then they both sing together: “It doesn't change a thing But even so After twenty-five years, It's nice to know.”<sup>1</sup>

Our Gospel lesson today is part of Jesus' farewell discourse, the words he offers to his disciples, knowing that he is going to be handed over and betrayed. In the previous chapter, Jesus washes the disciples' feet and talks about a new commandment, “that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”<sup>2</sup> Then Jesus tells the disciples: “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” That's what we read last week. He explains how he is going ahead of them to prepare a place for them and that he will come back. For a people who are scared and confused, they are words of great comfort. He explains to them how he and the Father are one and then, in today's passage he says: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Do you love him?

Keeping Jesus' commandments involves, as we can discover in the previous chapter, loving one another the same way that Jesus loved us. Showing that kind of love is the way we demonstrate to Jesus that we love him.

Nigerian-American Enuma Okoro wonders if instead of the old WWJD stickers and bracelets that used to be around, asking “What would Jesus do?”, instead of those, he wonders if maybe we should have new stickers that say: IYLM, meaning “if you love me.” It might not roll off the tongue the same way that WWJD does. “But it could make us stop and ask what's really at stake with our next move in whatever situation we find ourselves.... If you love me, then find a way to show love and hospitality to those who are made in my image but may call me by another name. If you love me, then speak out when you see people

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<sup>1</sup> Sheldon Harnick, Jerry Bock, Joseph Stein, *Fiddler on the Roof*

<sup>2</sup> John 13: 34-35

mistreated for being made in another variation of my image. But do it in a way that honors me, not in a way that honors the world.

“If you love me, then name the false gods you worship as false, the ones made of gold and silver, and put them behind you with the power of the Advocate I give to you. If you love me, love others as I have loved you: with a kind of love that expects and calls to be loved in return but that still, despite the conditions, will love anyway.”<sup>3</sup>

*If you love me*: let those words swirl in your being the next time you find yourself facing a difficult person, or a loved one who knows how to get under your skin or a temptation to be less than Jesus calls us to be. Remember these words the next time you consider being less than faithful to a friend or a spouse or less than honest at work or at home. If you love me, then you will keep my commandments.

This is a particularly important lesson for us today. Our country is divided in so many ways and those on opposite sides of the political spectrum are not particularly good at talking with each other, and maybe just as important listening to each other. In some cases, one side belittles the other, suggesting that your views are not simply wrong, but rather inhuman or sinful, or un-American. What might happen if in this country everyone of us—democrat and republican, poor and rich, conservative and liberal, long time citizen and newly arrived immigrant—what might happen if we all took a deep breath, and remembered these words of Jesus—*If you love me*—before responding to anyone else, especially those who are different from us?

Of course this is not easy to do. It never has been. So Jesus promises his disciples that he will send them another Advocate, or Counselor, or helper, who will not simply abide with them, but will be in them. The Spirit who continues Christ’s ministry of love lives in us, giving us the power to be loving as God is loving. The Spirit lives in us and invites us to seek the well-being of all persons whoever they may be.

Nancy Ramsay, pictures a scene from Alan Paton’s novel *Ab, But Your Land Is Beautiful*, “that may illustrate this life-giving power of love and the assurance that God’s love discloses what is most true. Paton describes a situation in South Africa during apartheid, when laws prevented black South Africans from mixing with whites. At the death of a white South African official who had worked within the system to humanize life for the oppressed, the blacks were turned away from his funeral, despite the wishes of the family. It was a terrible insult. Isaiah Buti, a black pastor, visited the white chief justice, whom he had reason to imagine as a friend to his oppressed people. He asked the judge to participate in the Good Friday service where the congregation would observe Jesus’ practice of washing the disciples’ feet. He asked the chief justice to wash the feet of a congregant who had been a servant in the judge’s home and had cared for his children. The chief justice readily agreed, though he asked to participate in the service without any prior announcement. When the time came for the judge to wash Martha Fortuin’s feet, the judge came forward and washed and dried her feet. Before he rose to return to his seat, he took her feet and gently kissed them both. It was a gesture that set healing in motion, because in that simple extra expression of care, he disclosed the truthfulness and the life-giving power of God’s love. Of

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<sup>3</sup> Enuma Okoro, May 21, Sixth Sunday of Easter, April 19, 2017 © The Christian Century. April 26, 2017 Issue.

course the act became known and the judge's career was affected, but he had no regrets, because he too experienced the life-giving power of love that helps us recognize each other as neighbors."<sup>4</sup>

Wherever you may be on your journey of faith, Jesus calls us to show our love for him by keeping his commandment to love. Do you love me? After all these years, it's good to know.

Let us pray: "Loving God, in whom we live and move and have our being, help us to choose life in you, that we may keep the commands of Jesus, follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and witness to the hope that is within us, sharing Christ's love in the world. Amen."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bartlett, David L.; Barbara Brown Bartlett. *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 2, Lent through Eastertide*. © 2010 Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.