

## Discipleship in the Lectionary - 05/14/2023



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary Year A

Sunday, May 14<sup>th</sup>

John 14:15-21

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### The mark of the Christian

While the activity of the Holy Spirit is best demonstrated in Acts, it is the Gospel of John that helps us understand the theology of the Holy Spirit. In the lectionary text, the promise of the Holy Spirit is sandwiched between two statements that emphasize how those who love Jesus (those who are promised the Holy Spirit) are those who keep His commands. The mark of the disciple is thus to love other Christians the way in which Jesus loved His disciples.

#### John 14:15-21 Commentary

Picking up where last week's text left off (14:1-14), this week's text falls within the section of John known as the Upper Room Discourse (chapters 13-17). These events occur on the night of the Last Supper and form part of Jesus' Farewell Discourse - where He prepares His disciples for His departure and the coming of the Holy Spirit. If last week the focus was on belief, this week the emphasis is on love and on the coming continued presence of God in the world through the Holy Spirit.

<sup>15</sup> *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."*

Jesus' words echo what is expected in the Deuteronomic Covenant. This includes the Ten Commandments and the urging from Moses to love and fear God. Verse 15 is thus an unmistakable indication of Jesus' authority. The same essence is expressed again in v.21: *"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me."* A similar expression is also found in v.23: *"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word..."* and its converse in v.24: *"Whoever does not love me does not keep my words..."* Anything that is said four times in only ten verses must be important. The message is clear: true love manifests in obedience.

Another approach here is to ask what commandments is Jesus referring to in v.15? In proximity to this text, Jesus commanded His disciples, *"Believe in God; believe also in me"* (14:1b). He also formally expresses His only commandment in John's Gospel:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (13:34-45). This commandment is reiterated shortly after this text:

*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. (15:12-13)*

<sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, <sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

The word rendered as Helper is *Paraklētos*. The promise of the Helper is sandwiched between two statements by Jesus that those who love Him are those who keep His commands. Up until this point, the Spirit has been represented by the word *Pneuma*. This change marks a shift in the role that the Holy Spirit will play in the lives of the disciples. The Spirit will be with the disciples forever (14:16). It will teach the disciples and remind them what Jesus taught them (14:26). The Holy Spirit will testify about Jesus (15:26). A definition of the English rendering *paraclete* is as follows: "one who is called to someone's aid" or "one who advocates another." Thus, the term may be used technically for a lawyer. More generally the word denotes one who acts on another's behalf as a mediator, an intercessor, or a comforter. In 1 John 2:1 Christ is called a *paraclete* as he represents people to God. This function is akin to His ministry as high priest (Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1614).

In v.16 Jesus refers to "another helper." Jesus continues to be our advocate with the Father as He goes onto His glorification while the Holy Spirit becomes our helper on earth. The mutual indwelling nature of the Spirit is described and the recognition the world rejects the truth. We can only see as we are able to see. As Barclay says, the Holy Spirit will not gate-crash anyone's heart.

<sup>18</sup> "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

The word "orphan" here can also refer to a disciple whose master has died. Like the definition implied, Jesus will not abandon His disciples. Jesus' promise, "I will come to you" (v.18) is generally accepted as referring to His post-resurrection appearances and not the coming of the Holy Spirit or the Second Coming. Verse 19 notes how Jesus will only appear to His disciples after His death and resurrection. There are no resurrection appearances that were recorded in Scripture where Jesus appeared to non-disciples. The promise of the Helper is a gift from God to those who love the Son. This love is reflected in a commitment to be a disciple of Jesus - a genuine commitment to keep Jesus' commandments and to respond to His teachings with obedience and faith. The final verse also stresses the crucial focus of John. Love is everything. God loves Jesus. Jesus loves God. God loves us. Jesus loves us. We love God through Jesus. We love each other. We are all bound together by the bonds of love.

### Reflections

Coming to faith is analogous to falling in love. Falling in love is not an abstract thing. It happens as a result of an encounter with another person. If faith is a relationship with the living Christ and in turn a reconciled relationship with the living God who sent Him, then faith can only come through a real encounter with Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who makes such an encounter possible. The only proof of this relationship is obedience. If Christ commanded us to love each other as Christ loved us (13:34), our obedience to this command reflects our love for Christ. Our obedience to this command is thus the mark of a Christian and the mark by which we are judged by the world: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:35).

### Application

- How would the world judge your Christian community based on 13:35?

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