

A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Renée Tembeckjian
Trinity Episcopal Church
10 May 2026
Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

“True Identity”

I grew up in a very close and *very* strict immigrant family. My mother would often cite that well-worn phrase, “So long as you live in this house, you will abide by our rules.” Her focus was on compliance, and pretty much everything was carved in stone. One family friend said we were living in a country called Rule-a-stan.

My father’s wisdom was informed differently. When he wanted to convey high expectations for my brother and me, he would simply say, *Remember who you are*. His message was not focused on compliance. It was centered in *identity*.

That identity derived from the family stories we were constantly bidden to remember – escaping the horrors of genocide and suffering forced separation, consoled only by the dream of new life and possibility in America, a promise forged in hard work and sacrifice.

Remember who you are. Fidelity to that principle was the only compass deemed worthy for us to rely on, the only compass that would never fail us.

I am grateful to be part of such a layered family story, but I confess there were times when I longed to be free of its demands. It wasn’t easy to stay true to such a personal standard and noble narrative ...but such narratives have a way of staying true to *us*...

...because while my father and mother and now gone from this earth, it turns out that my brother and I were not left orphaned. To this very day, that compass is with us... if we will only remember who we are...

...and whose we are.



In today’s Gospel, we encounter a teacher who wants his disciples to remember. Jesus knows that *he* will soon be gone – that his relentless teaching on social justice, his radical acts of inclusion and healing, his public demonstrations against hypocrisy in religious and secular leaders – have aroused a powerful movement against this Prince of Peace. Those in authority are colluding – not only to be rid of him, but to intimidate others from even thinking of joining such a movement. Surely once he is gone, there will be nothing left to compel his followers going forward.

Knowing that this unholy alliance of state and religion is plotting to end him, knowing that his disciples are about to witness his crucifixion and experience the searing pain of separation, Jesus prays that he himself will have the integrity and raw courage to stay true.

As he contemplates how to spend his last hours on this earth, what compass will he leave to guide them, to comfort and strengthen them, and to inspire them to continue along the good Way? He leaves them with this:

*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.ⁱ
...to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind,
and...to love your neighbor as yourself.ⁱⁱ*

All of the commandments – the full narrative of the law and the prophets – are summarized in this – the main points in the divine compass:

Love of God *and* Love of Neighbor.
Love of God *by* love of neighbor.
Love of God *in* love of neighbor.

This is more than a list of dos and don'ts carved onto stone tablets. This is not about compliance. This is about *identity*. Jesus wants his disciples to remember who they are...

And they will *need* to remember...because the Way of Jesus is more than some sugar-coated slogan or some pleasant-sounding points to ponder. The Way of Love is a call upon our very lives – to live as he lived, to choose as he chose, to uphold what he upheld:

It is to feed the hungry, it is to clothe the naked, heal the sick, and welcome the stranger. To follow the Way of Love is to summon the integrity and courage, as he did, to stand up and speak *for* the most vulnerable, and to stand up and speak *against* those who would discount or dishonor them. *If you love me, keep my commandments.*

It is not easy to stay true to such a layered and noble narrative. There are times when we wish to be free of its demands. We are, after all, imperfect, fallible, and very human beings, who are easily distracted by the allure of other stories – and other storytellers. And there are plenty of them in this world.

But as for those in the public sphere who dare to speak in his name, who brazenly insist that the Christian walk is compatible with any creed, position, or policy that satisfies its goals or pads its pockets at the cost of human suffering, we are called to respond in the same way Jesus did – to make our protest and turn those tables upside down.

We need to show that while the historic Jesus may be gone from this earth, we have not been left orphaned. The Gospel says that we are given an Advocate – the Spirit of Truth – the *divine* compass – which is with us always and will, indeed and ultimately, prevail in this world...if we will only remember who we are...

...and *whose* we are.

Amen.

ⁱ John 14:15

ⁱⁱ Matthew 22:35-40