

**John 14:15-21 – Easter 5 – You Will Keep My Commandments – May 10, 2026**  
*+In Nomine Iesu+*

In our Gospel reading, Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Now, that’s pretty clear. But we like to make excuses, don’t we? When Jesus calls us to obedience, we explain away His commandments with a million qualifications. We use our sinful nature to justify why they can’t apply to us. We accuse the Pastor of undermining grace and preaching works-righteousness. Or we interpret them to mean just the opposite of what Jesus says.

Anywhere else in life, when commands are given, the situation is clear. For example, a mother tells her son to go to bed. But, of course, he doesn’t want to go to bed. And he knows exactly what to do. He is an expert in the pseudo-theology I intend to critique. And his internal argument goes like this.

Mother says go to bed. She means I am tired. She does not want me to be tired. But I can get over my tiredness by going outside to play. What she really means when she says go to bed, is for me to go outside and play.

We use this kind of argumentation with the commands of Jesus. Let me give you four quick examples. Jesus says, “Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” But surely, Jesus wouldn’t want us to suffer. He wouldn’t want us to put up with persecution. So, if anyone criticizes us, we strike back immediately and forcefully. When attacked, we argue, we accuse, we curse.

Jesus says, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And yet, we interpret this to mean we should pay our taxes. That’s the context. But then we give our souls to our political parties—as if they are on God’s side. We sit glued to political television. We think that public policy is relevant, but the Gospel is irrelevant. We forget that we bear the image of God. We forget our citizenship is in heaven.

Jesus says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” And yet, we interpret this as a little nod to God on an occasional Sunday. It’s better than what most people are doing. But we still think seeking the kingdom should never affect our wallets or schedules—or life at home. We allow anything and everything to take priority over the purposes of God in our lives.

Jesus says, “Do not be anxious about your life,” But Jesus can’t expect us to actually trust Him with our lives and future. That’s too much of a demand. And so, that is precisely what we are—anxious—all of the time. We are constantly worried, paranoid, fearful about what others think of us—or about what the future may hold.

And everywhere it is the same. We don’t take Jesus at His Word. We explain away His clear commands. We ignore what He says because He is so unreasonable. We justify our actions. We make excuses. We deliberately avoid simple, literal obedience.

C. S. Lewis once said, “To have faith in Christ means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice.” I think Lewis is right. Faith, love, and obedience are all tied up together. And that’s what I want to talk about today.

In our Gospel reading, we find Jesus with His Disciples at their Passover meal on Maundy Thursday. John clearly thought this day was important. He spends all of chapters

13-17 on this Upper Room Discourse. And there is a special emphasis on what Jesus said and prayed that day. And the goal of Jesus' words from the beginning of this discourse has been to encourage and comfort His followers.

Much is about to happen in Jerusalem. The cross looms large before Him. And here, Jesus addresses the lives of His Disciples following His death and resurrection—and the coming of the Spirit.

And things get theologically deep and rich very quickly. He touches on the nature of the Trinity and the inner relationships within the Godhead. Jesus reveals that He is a full participant in the divine nature. He is the icon of God in the world. And in Christ, we encounter that relationship.

We heard a portion of this same chapter last week. Here, Jesus makes one of his famous "I Am" statements. And He makes claims of necessity and exclusivity for Himself as the one Mediator between God and humanity. He says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

And so, it is as Peter says in Acts 4, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Thus, our reading today builds upon our spiritual need for a restored relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Here, Jesus begins by saying, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." And then He concludes with "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me."

And I want to deal with each of these elements from Jesus today—what Jesus means by loving, keeping, and commandments. Now, this isn't the only place we hear from John—using these three words together. Such vocabulary is all over his first Epistle.

For example, in 1 John 2, John says, "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

Love for Jesus Christ is expressed in obedience. We often think of love emotionally. And of course, there is a sense in which this is true. But even the emotional aspect of love for Christ is evidenced by our heartfelt desire to obey Him.

This means we can't say we love God and still do our own thing. We can't even say we believe in God and do our own thing. Love is expressed in action. Faith is expressed in action.

This is true of our human relationships as well. If we tell our children that we love them—and we don't feed them—if we make them sleep in the garage—they will know that love is not genuine. If we treat them with kindness and direction—if we provide food and shelter—they will know our love is true.

It might seem surprising to us—that in a chapter filled with grand promises intended to comfort His Disciples—we also encounter so many uses of the word *if*. In grammar, we call these conditional sentences. All through John 14, Jesus not only tells us of His provision for the Disciples after His Ascension, but also the conditions by which we may be certain of His promises.

Last week we heard Him say, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself.” He says, “If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.” “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” And now, He says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

But the *ifs* of John 14 do not make our place with Christ less certain—but more certain—granted His conditions are met. There are cause-and-effect relationships in God’s economy. And particularly central is the *if-condition* that pertains to our love for Christ.

God has provided an objective guide to love—and we actually find it in His commandments. Jesus summarized God’s commands in terms of love. In Matthew 22, Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Again, faith, love, and obedience are all tied up together. I was reading a commentary as I prepared for this sermon. And this commentary particularly confronted Lutherans for a certain type of antinomianism—all because of the distinction between law and Gospel. And the way it plays out, he is often correct.

What is antinomianism? Well, I am glad you asked. If you break the word in pieces—*anti* means *against*—*nomos* is the Greek word for *law*—*ism* is a suffix that describes *doctrines, movements, and behaviors*.

Antinomianism is the belief that the moral law is not binding upon Christians and should not be preached in churches. Grace frees believers entirely from the law—not just from its condemnation. Antinomians assert that we are saved in such a way as to be free from obedience to God’s commands. Grace means we can live as we please.

But Jesus just doesn’t speak this way. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins with the Gospel. He then proceeds to detail the kind of lives Christians are to pursue. In fact, we are salt and light in the world. Loving our neighbors and our enemies. Living with Christ as our King. Seeking first the Kingdom of God. Free from faithless anxiety. Loving Him by keeping His commands.

Martin Luther wrote a whole treatise against antinomianism. It’s actually not a Lutheran idea—just prominent among some Lutherans. And here he said, “There is no justification without sanctification, no forgiveness without renewal of life, no real faith from which the fruits of new obedience do not grow.” And the Reformers make this point in our own Augsburg Confession.

When Jesus encounters Peter in John 21, following the resurrection, He asks him three times, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” It starts getting uncomfortable. Remember that Peter had denied Christ three times.

But Jesus knows what He is doing. And Peter is in a place where the grace of God is found. That’s important. But each time, Jesus responds with a command, “Feed my sheep.” And then Jesus tells Peter how he is going to die. But we’ll leave that alone today. Peter has a few years left. But notice that love leads to obedience.

Peter has a unique calling. He is an Apostle and Evangelist. Our vocations might not be exactly the same. But love still leads to obedience—even glad obedience—or it isn’t

love. And the point is this—when we believe in Christ—the very first fruit of faith is to love Christ. This must be in us. It must abound, or nothing is right. And love is expressed not just in emotion, but in obedience. It is just like we see in the family. Children love their parents through obedience.

Remember that Jesus says at the end of our reading, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.” Let me make a comment about this word *keep*. Keeping the commandments isn’t a reluctant giving of ourselves to a greater power. It isn’t forced or coerced. It is welcome in the believer’s life.

The Greek verb for *keep* can mean *to obey*. Some of the translations render it that way. But it means something more. To keep the commandments is to live in fidelity with them. It means that we treasure them—we value them—we respect them.

We are on our third time through the three-year Bible reading plan. That’s nine years of reading the Bible every day. And if you are still with us, we start into the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm today. This Psalm expresses what I am talking about today. And this Psalm is very long. We tackle it eight verses at a time. And you will be blessed in your readings in the days ahead.

Let me remind you of one verse from this Psalm. The Psalmist says, “I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.”

This is the perspective on the commandments that Jesus instills in us. All of this originates with Christ. Grace comes first—as forgiveness and regeneration. This is the essence of the Gospel. It is His call that makes all the difference. And then, the first step of obedience is itself an act of faith in Christ’s Word. It is worship. And it is an act of love for Him. It is as Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

You may have noticed Jesus has some things to say between His two statements on obedience. And there is more there than we can tackle today. But notice the aid of the Holy Spirit—here called the Paraclete—the Helper. And then Jesus Himself comes to His people as well—think sacramentally here. He changes our hearts and minds. He renews our lives. He causes us to embrace His commands—not as words of condemnation—but as His gracious will for our lives. Faith, love, and obedience are all tied up together.

Let me leave you with one last word from John—here 1 John 5. He uses all of our keywords today in this passage as well. In fact, 1 John is something of a sermon on the Upper Room Discourse.

But John says it well. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”

In the name of Jesus. Amen.