

Sermon 2011 Easter 6
May 29, 2011
Text: John 14:15-21
Theme: "IF You Are Good..."

Human beings have a "works" mentality and that fact gets in the way of our faith on a regular basis. You know how it works from the time kids are little, we get rewards for all manner of good behavior. Some children get treats for going to the bathroom in the potty. When our kids were young, we had friends who had a bowl of M&M's on the back of the toilet labeled "potty treats." I loved going to the bathroom there. The treats were great.

Later on kids might get money for good grades and extra allowance for doing chores around the house that need doing. In school, teachers have horrendously complex discipline systems that range from colored cards to pictures of farm animals. I used to tell my teachers when I had a school that the test for an appropriate discipline system was one that I could figure out without explanation. If the pastor cannot crack the code, then no second grader should be expected to do so either.

By the time we are in confirmation, many congregations play Lutheran Jeopardy where the confirmands stand before a board of so-called "elders" to answer pre-scripted questions and show the congregation how bright they are. Of course the kids who have strong family support do well and the ones whose families are not all that involved do poorly and the proud and haughty get prouder and haughtier.

So my point is that it is no wonder we are a bunch of work-righteous little heathen when we have been rewarded for every mundane achievement our entire lives and punished every time we have failed to measure up to whatever yardstick

the current rule maker is using. As children, if you are good for the doctor, you will get a sucker. How about be still for the doctor because that is what I expect of you so he can better examine you? As adults, work hard long hours and you will win a vacation to Hawaii. How about give your employer a fair amount of work and he pays you what he owes you? So sometimes it is shocking for people when they come to church.

Doing a good job around here is like wetting your pants in a dark suit. You get a nice warm feeling but nobody notices. And that is as it should be. Jesus did not say, "if you love me enough, then I will give you a sucker." Nor did he say, "if you keep my commandments, you will get more stuff than someone who lives like a heathen." He said,

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Just a simple "if – then" clause. If you stand outside in January you will get cold. You don't have to do anything particular. It will just happen because of the situation you are in. If you love Jesus, that is, if you are in a relationship with Jesus, the reality of that has consequences. You have to understand that love is an action verb for God. He cannot love without acting on our behalf. So having a feeling without an action is meaningless to him. We are the ones who so often disconnect feelings and actions. We talk about how we feel instead of what we think in order to somehow make every silly notion okay. And no one is allowed to argue with a feeling. And why would you? That's like nailing jelly to the wall.

I have recently heard both of the following statements.

"I feel that people should have to work at something to receive welfare benefits."

"I feel that if people are on welfare, they need to be loved and shown that we respect them as human beings."

You know what I think? I not only think, but I know God said that we are to love our neighbors as Christ loved us AND that if any of them refuses to work then neither shall they eat. Furthermore, I think that if they cannot or will not take care of their children, God says that we should love those children as Christ loved us and take them away from hurtful and neglectful parents and if reunification takes place, it will have to take place when the children are grown and have been taught that God expects us to work for a living and that drugs are for medicinal not recreational purposes. That's what I think. I "feel" bad for people who make bad choices and lose their kids, but that does not change what I "think."

The Psalmist says that the Lord's word is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path. That means that while our feelings can be all over the board depending on how much sleep we got and what we had for breakfast, our thoughts can be guided by the Lord. We can be certain of what we think regardless of what we feel. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. I know that I love Jesus. Therefore, I know that I keep his commandments. That is the norm for me. It doesn't matter how I feel about his commandments or if I feel like I am keeping them well or poorly. I know that my relationship with Jesus empowers me to keep his commandments. I know that even when Satan tempts me to disobey the Lord, I can absolutely rely on this truth. I love Jesus. Therefore, I keep his commandments.

I am not keeping rules that earn me favor. I do not expect rewards for doing this. It is simply who the Lord has made me in Holy Baptism. Because I have been

placed in relationship with Jesus and I am fed by his body and blood, he will make himself manifest in me. That is, he will show through me and people will see him in me. So I don't have to work to "act" a certain way. I have been told on more than one occasion that I don't "act" like a pastor. I am not offended by vulgar words. I do not pretend that I am un-tempted by sin, but neither am I scared of sin. I don't try to put on a holy and pious act that makes people comfortable in their illusions that pastors are somehow not "one of them." And I have absolute confidence that Jesus shines brightly through me and into the lives of people who need to see him. Sometimes I am offensive and I tell you things you don't want to hear. Sometimes I am empathetic and I offer you a lifeline when you're drowning. Mostly I just keep shining the light of Jesus into a dark world and reminding everyone that he is more important than anything and everything that occupies our time.

That is who we all are. That is what we all do. Don't get all caught up and sidetracked with how you feel about it. THINK instead of feeling. TRUST that because you love Jesus, you will keep his commandments and that he is using you to search out those who do not know him or only know of him. You carry the reality of his death for our sin to those people and you carry the promise of resurrection and eternal life to those people and you do it with his Word which is a lamp unto your feet. That's what I think.