

Sermon 2008 Easter 6
Text: John 14:15-21
Theme: "How Close To Empty Are You?"

It sounds like a guilt saying doesn't it? Jesus says, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." Does that not sound like Jesus is using guilt, like a mother who says, "If you really loved me, you would clean up your room?" The kid thinks, "Now wait a minute! I really love my mom and I really don't care if my room is messy and what exactly does the cleanliness of my room have to do with loving my mom?" Or a wife might say to her husband, "If you really loved me you would listen to me." And the husband thinks, "Now wait a minute! I really love my wife, but I also really don't care about the family problems of the lady across the street from her best friend's cousin's landlady." Or the child might say to the parent, "If you really loved me, you would let me go to Chicago with my friends." And the parent thinks, "Now wait a minute! I really do love my child, but I also know that he is human and therefore sinful, and bad choices are easily made when there is too much freedom."

If we misunderstand love then we cannot understand what Jesus is saying to us when he says, "If you love me, you will obey

what I command." But I promise you; Jesus is not trying to use guilt to manipulate us into proper behavior. We might hear it that way because of *our* faulty understanding of the word love. We use the word love as though it is an emotion, so if you feel a certain way about me, then you will behave a certain way toward me. And that logic is flawed because I feel very warmly towards my children and still get angry with them. Sometimes I get angry *because* I feel warmly towards them and want them to be safe and happy. So how I *feel*, has little to do with love.

Jesus feels very warmly toward us and wants us to feel warmly toward him, but he is not so naive as to think that warm feelings are going to cause us to be obedient. The only thing that will cause us to obey is love, not warm feelings. Love is far more powerful than warm feelings.

Conversely, sometimes we seem to think that proper obedience inspires Jesus to love us. If we are more obedient, then Jesus will love us more. But that is untrue. Love is objective not subjective. Love is the objective reality that Jesus Christ gave his life and soul for us. There is nothing we can do to

make him love us more anymore than we could do something to make him die for us more. His love is an objective reality. It exists regardless of my obedience or lack thereof. So love is not the reason for my obedience. Love is the cause of my obedience.

Jesus is stating a simple fact when he says, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." Where there is love, there is obedience. Love is like the gas in your car. When you press on the gas pedal, fuel is delivered to your engine and the car moves. Now the car does not obey because of how it feels about the driver. Rather, the car moves because of the objective reality of fuel entering the engine. If your car is out of fuel, the engine will not run and the car will not move. I don't think it will do any good to explain to the car that you feel unloved when it does not obey your command.

If there's no gas; go and get some. Put it in the tank and you will find that it does wonders for the working of the car. Likewise, the love of God works in our lives like gasoline works in our cars. Now our cars have that handy little gauge to tell us how much fuel is in the tank, but what about determining the

level of love is in our lives. Unfortunately, we don't have a handy love gage anywhere.

Of course, I suppose there is a reason for that. I know how it is with my car. I hate stopping to get gas, especially when I know it will cost me \$50 to fill up. I will wait until that needle is just under empty before taking the time to stop and get gas. I don't ever run out, but I am generally running on fumes when I finally stop to buy gas. Would we be any different with our spiritual lives?

I suspect we would ignore our love gage until the needle was below empty and then we would scramble to fill up. However, the consequences for running out of love are substantially worse than running out of gas in the car. The consequence for running out of love is spiritual death. Thank God, that while we don't have a gauge, we do have a way to see when love is getting low. If you see a lack of obedience in your life – then there is a lack of love. If there is a lack of love, then faith is weak and you need to fill up.

When we see a lack of obedience in our lives or the lives of others, don't waste time contemplating the cause of the disobedience and trying to assess blame for the disobedience. What is the point of analyzing disobedience and assigning blame? We know the cause of disobedience. Love is low. Faith is weak. Which particular sin disobedience used to manifest itself is almost irrelevant. The cause is the same. Where there is disobedience, there is a lack of love. The love gauge is showing empty.

As God's love flows into us through God's Word and the Sacraments, our faith is empowered and we are able to make better choices. We are able to better distinguish right from wrong. We avoid more of the bad situations. Then the cycle feeds on itself. The more love we have, the more we are obedient to God's call to his Word and Sacrament which again fills us with love. The opposite is also sadly true. The less love we have, the less we receive Word and Sacrament and the harder it is to be obedient.

So, when we come across the disobedient person, what shall we do? I know for sure that pointing out his disobedience does

little good if that is where you stop. If I am sitting along a dusty road in my car and I'm out of gas, a lecture on letting my gas get so low doesn't really help me. But if you fill up my tank AND teach me how to read the gauges, now I am empowered.

We usually know when we are trapped in disobedience. I cannot think of one time in my adult life that I did not know I was sinning. But what we often do not know is how to be obedient, how to free ourselves from the sin that so easily ensnares us. And the really complex part of the equation is that it is nothing we do. It is something we receive. Come to the water. Be filled with the love of God.

Put down the self-help book. Save the lectures. Drop the guilt. Come to the water and drink deeply from the love of God. And I guarantee you that obedience will come. Increase the love; strengthen the faith and obedience increases. It's that simple. Come to the water. AMEN.