

Opening Song: Worship Theme: thankfulness for comfort and assurance in God’s care
 “10,000 Reasons” Overhead

Invocation: Isaiah 40:21-31

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Awana, Tim Giordano

Preparing the Heart in Song:
 “Our God” Overhead
 “In Christ Alone” Overhead
 “Majesty” Song # 10

Offering and Offertory: “Amazing Grace”
 Tara Wixom

Installation and Dedication of New Youth Ministry
 Directors: Jason & Brandy Nyberg

Message: “Knowing God” John 14:21-31
 Pastor John Bronson

Response to the Word:
 “As the Deer” Song # 548

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evening in the Word:
 5:30 to 7 pm in the Library
 Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:38-52

Lois McMartin and EFCA ReachGlobal Ministries: the Spirit will gift Lois with strength for travel and wisdom for counsel as she travels overseas to missionary families; the Lord will raise up both short term and career missionaries for worldwide missions; the recently announced changes in personnel and the refocusing of charitable and home missions will prove effective for advancing the kingdom of God’s righteousness

President Obama: the Spirit will give him wisdom to broker a peace between Israel and the Palestinians; the Lord will protect him from sickness of body, mind and spirit; he will seek truth with humility

Music Ministry: Kari Walden will have joy in the pursuit of excellence in leading the men’s, women’s and young women’s choirs; that each one singing will be focused on their musical performance for the season; that the Lord will be pleased to speak His truth through the songs that are sung and the worship services of which they are a part

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: MSgt. David Howell, Army (son of Eileen Hewitt): that he not deploy overseas again for his family’s sake.

Young Adult of the Week: Lukas Valadez: for the Lord’s guidance overall in his life and specifically for his music and band ministry

Please pray for our homebound family members: Harley & Hilda Chapman , Carol Koehler, Gary & Ruth Lentz, Fred & Jean Pauly

The title of today’s message is “Knowing God” and the text for the message is John 14:21-31. I will read the passage momentarily, but first let me make a couple of observations. How many of you grew up in church? Usually [it is] the majority: so did I. I grew up in the “true church” which of course was the Presbyterian Church, but we went through that last week! When I was a boy and up through quite a long time into my early adulthood this is the image I had of the church. I think it was [based on] a painting I had seen somewhere. There is a kind of a rural scene with trees and green grass. There is a white chapel with a [tall] spire. It sits in this peaceful setting. My experience of the church was that the church was well and well established. People would come into the life of the church and they would go away from the life of the church and the life of the church really just had to do with the well-being of the people who came and went. [Now] let me give you the picture of the church that is true today: envision an urban landscape filled with all kinds of neon lights. Imagine gaudy, raucous and immoral suggestions. Envision trash in the streets. Envision unsavory people lingering in the shadows. Then envision the church that is dim, half lit, and rather than a peaceful setting envision a wind blowing from a black sky, shifting the trash along the street, and there is almost no sound that comes from the church. It is not the world I grew up in that I live in today. The world I grew up in a mere fifty years ago was a world that still thought of itself fundamentally as a decent and Christian people working out the affairs of life, finding strength and counsel in the church. Today the church is under threat.

So as we listen to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ that I am about to read from John’s Gospel, 14:21-31, we would be wise to understand that in the grace of God and in His sovereign care of us we have been returned to a situation that is more like what the first disciples faced than the church has been for a long time. For when Jesus spoke to His disciples, He spoke to them in an upper room, and they were in that upper room hiding away from the hostile forces that would soon reach into that room, pull Jesus out and nail Him to a cross. We should never give ourselves the illusion that the world was all excited and happy about the message of Jesus Christ when those same eleven men, having met with the resurrected Lord and having received the gift of the Holy Spirit went out into that world and began to speak about the salvation which is only available through Jesus Christ. What the world did was to kill most of those men.

“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.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you have heard is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.’

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’” If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.”

In reflecting upon the word, both this section and elsewhere, but primarily looking at this [passage], Jesus could hardly have made it more plain that the key to salvation is loving Him, loving God. The one who loves Jesus, He says, the one who loves Me, will be loved by the Father in addition to being loved by Jesus. Hearing that, if you are a good evangelical type Christian, a little question mark might rise up in your mind: “We’re not shifting our ground, are we, in terms of the Gospel? It sounds like Jesus is saying, ‘I will love you if you love me.’ Isn’t that a bit

backward?” For instance in I John 4:10 and 19 (remember this is what the Apostle John wrote), *“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”* Then in verse 19 John writes, *“We love because he first loved us.”* You could turn equally to Romans 5:8 where Paul writes to the Romans, *“...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* And again, in Romans 5:10 Paul writes this, *“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life.”* Surely if we are well-grounded in the Christian faith, biblically grounded, it is the great affirmation of the faith that God loves us already; that we begin with Him loving us. His love does not wait for ours; it precedes it. His love comes before ours and imparts the gifts of faith and freedom to love into our hearts. Therefore it comes before and is the motivation for our obedience. That is true.

But this is not the point that Jesus was making to His men in the Upper Room. Of the verses that I have cited, the one that brings us closest to Jesus’ meaning in John 14:21 is Romans 5:10. Paul in Romans 5 affirms that those who are reconciled to God – this is what happens through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – those are the ones who are reconciled and are now being saved. Notice the tense [of the word]. We have a very strong inclination, for understandable reasons, to say, “Saved: done!” But that is not scripture’s point of view. Scripture’s point of view is “Saved and now on the way.” Just think about the past week. Are there things in this past week which you wished hadn’t happened? Things may have come out of your mouth, or perhaps never made it so far but dominated your mind. Most of us, certainly I, have a great deal in myself from which I need to be saved. For the marks, the patterns, the hangover of the flesh still works a powerful influence in me, and I have multiple occasions for crying out to God, “Have mercy upon me, O Lord!” That is what this means: that those of us who have been reconciled to God now have the glorious opportunity, the freedom that when we fall on our face we can cry out to Him and say, “Lord, pick me up! Do not leave me here wallowing in the consequences of my recent failures.” This is what it says: *“If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life.”*

What does that mean? Doctrinally this refers to sanctification. Sanctification – which is being made sacred or being made holy or being made pure: those are all different ways of capturing the meaning of the word “sanctification” – is the process by which we increasingly put to death the habits of heart and mind which are shaped by the world and follow the way of life set by the prince of the power of the air. When I was talking to Jason and Brandy, [installing them as our new Youth Directors], the reason I read the portion of scripture I read [2 Timothy 4:1-5], is because our young people, of course, are particularly and peculiarly tempted by the world, and in particular the world’s music, and that music, much of it, pumps into their understanding a godless perspective and is filled with sensuality, filled with self-focus, filled with a continual message that the whole meaning of life is sensual satisfaction and relational intensity without concern for moral rightness or spiritual knowledge. So opposing that, speaking against that and doing so with patience and teaching is critical for the well-being of each of those young people, and it is hardly less so for us [all]. Our lives, then, are more and more consecrated to the purposes and the truths and reflective of the character and the purity of the Lord. That is the aim, that is the goal, that is the desire that should be active in each of our hearts. On the personal level it means that such persons now work cooperatively with God and God will be close to them. If you look at James 4:8 James says to all of us, *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”* That is an affirmation and a promise given to those already reconciled through the blood of Jesus Christ.

What Jesus says is that those who love Him are those who keep His commandments. We are going on in the passage. It is important for us to understand what is going on between Jesus and His men here. It is important for us to recognize that Jesus is not at this point teaching a conditional love, one which measures out [its responses] according to how well or completely we manage to keep all the rules. If that is what Jesus is saying it would contradict the basic message of the gospel. I don’t think that was His intention. This is what conditional love says,

“I will love you if and just so far as you are good [meet my expectations].” Some parents do this to their children. It is a horrible thing to do to your child. Your child needs to know you love them absolutely. That, in fact, is why you give them so much grief when they go off track. When they go off track you say, “My heart is grieved, my spirit is troubled, my mind is yelling at me: Don’t go into the pit! But of course because I am a mature Christian I say, “Well, have you thought carefully about all the implications of what you might run into and hear and the temptations that might arise in that circumstance?” You are like the little boy Dr. James Dobson talked about who was told to go to the corner and sit down. You say I am sitting down on the outside but in the inside I am yelling at the top of my voice!

Jesus is referring to those who because they love Him seek to fulfill and want to keep His commandments, because that is what love does. Some of you know that in my home we have a most equitable arrangement. That arrangement is that [my wife] Nini cooks food and John eats it! But now you need to understand that the whole force of true equity and the manifestation of my sterling character is that I wash up all the dishes. The real story is that Nini cooks and makes a mess, I eat the food and exhaust myself cleaning up the mess she made. Now that is love, right? That is true devotion. That is because I love her. That is why: because I love her, and I want her to know that.

So Jesus is referring to those who because they love Him seek to fulfill or want to keep His commandments. Beyond that, they want to please the Lord. They want as it were to receive the smile of His good pleasure. They want the Lord to be magnified in the eyes of the world. Such people delight in the things of God. They want the Lord to be magnified and blessed by all.

So we understand what Jesus is saying and what He is anticipating from His men, but as you read this passage you recognize that the disciples don’t get it. They are perplexed by Jesus’ statement. This, again, is what Jesus says: *“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.”* It is that last part which has the men perplexed. As we looked at this a little bit last week, one of the men says – Judas, not Iscariot – “Lord, how is it you will manifest yourself to us and to nobody else?” That is basically what they are asking Jesus. Haven’t we all of us wondered at times about that? How many of have wished that Jesus would just walk in sometime? I do! I wouldn’t mind Him walking in right now and seeing what we all would do.

What Jesus says is that He will make Himself “manifest”. If you don’t know what the word manifest means you might think, “O well, that’s the answer: He is going to make Himself manifest!” The problem is this doesn’t answer the question at all. This is what the word “manifest” means according to the Greek term that was used. It is only found in John 14:21 and 22. One of the – we have people in the world who do strange things. There were a couple of old guys who spent their whole lives writing down the definitions of Greek and Aramaic words. Can you imagine doing that? Wouldn’t that be a calling? It sure blesses the rest of us because it is a whole lot of work that I wouldn’t want to do. This is what they found out, that the word “manifest” means “to make visible”. Moulton and Milligan, another couple of guys, speak of its use in some other stuff you don’t care about, as “to make an official report”. Obviously that is not the way Jesus is using the word. Another commentator says that it is “to make a presentation in a clear and conspicuous form”. I want you to look at those words and say to yourself, “OK, Jesus is saying He is going to make something visible, and as an official report and clear and manifest only to the people who believe in me. Everybody else won’t know anything. How’s He going to pull that off? You can see why they are perplexed. It doesn’t make any sense. There is another usage. In the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament it made a reference to the episode recorded in Exodus 33:13-18 where Moses says to God, “Would you please show yourself to me?” And God did.

But this is what Jesus says to the men, it is the next verse: *“If anyone loves me he will keep my word and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”* This says little if anything more than what

Jesus has already said in verse 21. But then Jesus goes on and in verse 23 listen to what He says: *“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.”* Beloved we have just entered new territory. Commandments are words, but Jesus at this point puts the focus not on keeping Jesus’ commandments, but on keeping Jesus’ words. Word is far broader, much broader than simply a reference to His commandments. One way of understanding the sad career of the Pharisees, who began with and purported to keep a passionate love for God’s Word, but what they ended up was reducing God’s words [to commandments], or more exactly, they reduced their love for God, to obedience. But is that what God desires? What God looks for, what God wants from us, is faith working through love. That is Galatians 5:6. Think of the contrast between the Pharisees, who looked upon God’s commandments as a set of expectations that God laid down, demanding that they keep them in rigid consistency, and now think of the words of [King] David as they are given to us in Psalm 119:10-16. David says, *“With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.”*

It is important for us to recognize that mere obedience without love can simply be a way of buying off trouble, a form of manipulation, even a power play. Listen parents, how many of you can identify with this? Did you ever wonder why Johnny was so helpful until Johnny said, “May I...” Then someplace in your heart you think to yourself, “You little bum! You did all those good things just to buy my good will!” And Johnny says, “I ain’t dumb!” What was that about? That was the Pharisees’ attitude toward God! Do the right thing so you can get the good things from God.

But that is not what God wants. God wants us to love Him, to delight in Him. Would it not be a sad thing if the only reason I did the dishes at home was to ensure that my wife cooked the next meal? Or that the only reason that I would give her a gift on her birthday was to be sure that she would continue to supply me with the good things I enjoy? O what a sad marriage that would be, constantly buying!

The question comes to us. What Jesus says is that we are to keep God’s words. To keep is something more than to merely observe or obey. To keep in fact is to hold precious. We have an echo of this in our word “keepsake.” It is something retained because it has special value to us, usually being associated with happy or otherwise memorable memories. What is at issue here is the distinction between the letter of the law and its spirit. Is the word of God a keepsake for us? Do I associate positive memories, happy thoughts, do I delight to come to it, when I approach the word do I say, “Ah, I shall be blessed!” Do we keep the word because we have happy and meaningful memories of God’s blessings? This describes not a dysfunctional relationship between God and the believer, but a well-functioning, a satisfying, a fulfilling relationship between God and the believer. I fear that many of us have dysfunctional relationships with our heavenly Father because we live in a grudging pattern of minimal obedience in the hopes of avoiding trouble and gaining occasional good things. That does not describe a loving relationship at all!

Taking note of this difference between the narrower concern to keep Jesus’ commandments and the broader concern to keep Jesus’ words prepares us to understand what Jesus goes on to say about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Already in verse 16 of this chapter Jesus has introduced the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth and our Helper. In the context it is clear the Spirit is given to help us keep the commandments. At this point (v. 23) Jesus broadens the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He says in vv. 25-26, *“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”* Notice how that ties into the whole issue of keeping the word of God. The Holy Spirit is given to us first of all so that we can do that, we can keep His word! As I have said before, you can’t love what you don’t know. One of the reason why so many Christians have a fragile, low level

love for God is that they just don't know; they just haven't read; they haven't spent the time to fill their minds with what God has said to us about Him and His love for us and how He cares for us. So they are clueless. But we have received the Spirit that we might know.

We have forgotten, I believe, how great a curse ignorance is. Historically ignorance was simply not knowing very much. You just didn't know very much. Most people knew what pertained to their immediate surroundings, their craft or trade and the various practices and traditions, the legends and stories that made sense of their world and their local space. They knew nothing of the larger realities of the world around them, almost nothing of history, nothing of science and the nature of the universe. They were just buried in not knowing anything. Ignorance is different in our day. In our day we are buried in information. Did you ever have the temptation when you are sitting there looking at your computer screen, you have the internet on and you would like to remove the screen from existence: whammo, I am going to turn off the world! There is a reason for this. Information is not knowledge until it becomes the basis for understanding. The challenge for us is to monitor the remorseless drone of sound-bytes which are designed to capture and hold our attention long enough to plant the seed of desire or doubt, fear, hope, whatever other emotion is considered desirable relative to the subject being advertised. I listen to an advertisement on the radio. The intent of the advertisement is to alert us to a growing problem in the North State. The growing problem in the North State is the reduced number of law officers, of law keepers, who protect us from the criminal elements of society. How many of us are aware of that? The policemen who come to my Bible Study – they don't come to protect us, they attend it! – they grumpous and groan about this; it is a big problem. But this is what the radio advertiser says, “Is crime rising in the North State?” The voice is filled with apprehension and you think to yourself, “Whoa!” That's what they want to do. They want to grab your emotions. The rest of the ad tells you virtually nothing.

The irony of the ceaseless flood of information that we receive is that it does not teach us how to or does not help us to think, that is, to rationally examine information, analyze, compare, evaluate and determine the reasonably objective or at least long term worth of something as well as its compatibility or harmony with a broader spectrum of our beliefs and values. The fact is that most of what we receive as information is not designed to help us think, but is designed to make us feel one way or another. In this regard Christianity is profoundly different than the other religions of the world. When Christianity is true to itself it is always revolutionary. It is so precisely because it promotes knowledge and understanding. Christianity is based on truth, historical and propositional or logical truth.

We will stop here. Let me simply say this: if you are going to keep this word, if you are going to keep the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, it will not do to open the Bible and say, “Lord, bless me with a few good feelings from Your Word.” We need to understand what God says, and that requires study.

Stand together please and pray with me: Our Father in heaven we thank you. You are faithful. You have given to us your Word; you have given to us Your Spirit. You have given to us the fellowship of believers. Grant our Father that we would respond to these multiple opportunities, that we would know this Word, delight in this Word, keep this Word, that we might indeed demonstrate our love for You and realize your love for us. We ask this, our Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. How might you illustrate that God already loved you before you respond in love to Him?

2. How might you illustrate that God already loved you before you respond in love to Him?

3. What do you think Paul meant when saying, “...*much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life*”?

4. Is the idea that our lives are to be “...*consecrated to the purposes and reflective of the character and purity of the Lord*” realistic or even attractive to you? If not, why not?

5. Is the word of God a keepsake for you; do you keep the word because you have happy and meaningful memories of God’s blessings?

6. “When Christianity is true to itself, it is always a revolutionary force in human affairs precisely because it promotes knowledge and understanding. Christianity is based on truth, historical truth and propositional or logical truth.” In what ways is Christianity “revolutionary”?

7. What in your experience are the most serious attacks on God’s revealed truth today? How has the Spirit helped you in handling these attacks?

8. How well can you summarize the “faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”?

9. “Action which is taken in light of the truth requires understanding, and it is right action for right reasons grounded in the truth which is looked for.” What are some examples of “right action” in light of the revealed truth of God’s Word?

10. What are the stronger parts of your personal identity, family, country, peer group, faith, other?