

Message: If You Love Me
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The four words you will hear in a toxic relationship is this: "If you love me." "If you love me you will do what I command you." Let's say a friend, a sibling, a child, a grandchild, a nephew, a co-worker came to you and said: I'm very interested in having a relationship with this person and they said to me "if you love me you will do what I command" what would you say to that person? Would you say, good, go for it. Or, would you say, "Get out and get out quickly!" Yes, what we would say is get out, that's a toxic relationship because love is not conditional.

Yet in our Gospel lesson, Jesus said just that – If you love me you will do what I command. Is it okay that Jesus just said it? Is Jesus asking us to enter into a toxic relationship with him? And with God?

[An acolyte said "No!"] Thank you, Barbara; you are absolutely correct, Jesus is not calling us into a toxic relationship. There has to be a different way to look at this.

Even though it's Mother's Day, I think it's something we should talk about and it's something we should not pass over as a church because there have been times during church history in the last eighteen hundred years that some inappropriate relationships have been created because of this phrase *if you love me you will do what I command you*.

Let's start with this, "If you love me you will follow my Commandments." What are Jesus's Commandments? This passage is in the Gospel of John. Before this passage, there is another story in John's Gospel that we hear every year at the least attended service at all Angels – Maundy Thursday. It's Gospel lesson on every single Monday Thursday service. Jesus takes a towel wraps it around him; takes a bowl of water; undoes the sandals of each of his disciples, and washes their feet. Once he is done with this incredibly powerful servant action and way of showing love he says, "I give you a new commandment love one another as I love you." So Monday Thursday; mandate Thursday; Jesus gives us a new mandate – love one another as I have loved you. That's his command.

What else does Jesus command? We began the service with it today – Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul with all your strength with all your mind and say it with me, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Yes, these are things that Jesus commands: If you love me you will love one another as I have loved you. If you love me you will love God with all your heart, you will love your neighbor as yourself.

Let's look at what Jesus is not saying: If you love me you will forget about everybody else, you will go out and do whatever you want for yourself alone, forget your neighbors, forget God, forget the tradition your parents handed to you, forget all that just love me and we're all good. He did not say that. Instead, he said, If you love me you will love God; you will love your neighbors as yourself; you will show love to one another as I love you.

Ready to go for another step a little deeper on this?

Some of you, like myself, watch on Sunday night on PBS *Call the Midwife*. Anyone else watch *Call the Midwife*? Good you don't have to be embarrassed it's fine, you can raise your hand, it's a good. Yeah, it's a great show; but, I wouldn't naturally watch this show. It's not one that I would sit down and say *oh I'm going to watch it!* I watch it because my wife watches it and what she loves, I love. I love spending time with her; I love talking with her. And Sunday night, at eight o'clock, we watch it together. Again it's not something I would naturally watch. This past Sunday was the season finale. It's all about Trixie's wedding; it was awesome; but, um, I wouldn't normally talk about Trixie's wedding okay; I wouldn't; except that I love my wife and she loves the show.

Christi wouldn't normally sit down and watch a Seattle Seahawks football game. She wouldn't; and a woman who has a Scottish background and his watches our money closely; there's no way shape or form she would ever buy the NFL Sunday Pass for 89 dollars for the season to specifically watch the Seattle Seahawks football team. But she does buy it and watch because she loves me. We watch football together and she knows that it's important for me to have her there and so she does that. It's not a conditional love; it's what we do when you love somebody else.

As you know with marriage and with any relationship I am simply scratching the surface. There are many things that we do for one another because of love. There are some of you that don't naturally want to go camping or hunting or fishing; but you do because the one you love loves it. There are others out there who wouldn't naturally go to Jo-Ann Fabrics, or Hobby Lobby, or get involved in a book club, or read poetry, but the one that you love does so do as well.

Jesus said if you love me you're going to love God, you're going to love one another. Let's go another step further, I'm working on a particular theology so we're going to have a little bit of fun with this; um, this is going to sound a little strange, but when you love somebody that person doesn't show up by themselves, they show up with a group of people – a mother and a father, sometimes siblings, sometimes a best friend, sometimes people you would never consider yourself associating with; but, because you love this person, and they have a family, and they have a group of friends or co-workers, you start extending yourself to them. You go out of your way to love them. And as and you know we talked about love last week as agape love which is a self-sacrificing love. It's not the puppy dog love, with little hearts and all that; this is the actual love where you're willing to do something for someone else. There are members of your extended family who you wouldn't normally love, or go out of your way to talk to, or associate with, but because of your love you do this.

Here's the theology: Jesus loves stinky people. Ever been around a fisherman? He called fishermen to follow him. This isn't your normal fisherman people; this is First Century Middle Eastern fishermen; people who go out fishing a lot. They smell like fish and the fish that they're fishing for are particularly smelly oily fish. Jesus called fishermen, in their smelly state, to follow him. Jesus touched lepers. Leprosy is a particular smelly skin condition. It didn't bother him. He seems to be interested in people like that. Smelly people: there was a man who had not bathed or showered or done anything like that in 38 years. Jesus went and talked to him and said *what can I do for you?* What about the blind men. What about the woman who had been hemorrhaging for over 30 years and could not keep herself clean? All of those people Jesus goes directly to and

they were probably really smelly. What about Jesus' friend Lazarus who had died, was in a tomb for four days, and he said *Roll away the stone* and what was said to him: Lord there is a stench. Jesus said, roll away the stone. Jesus goes to stinky people.

There are family members and friends of loved ones that we have that we don't find particularly attractive to hang out with but we do because our loved one loves them. Either in body or in their behavior, sometimes those people act smelly. But, we love them because our loved one loves them. Jesus is calling us to be in relationship with people we wouldn't normally love. *If you love me you will love the people that I love.*

The smelliest people I've ever been around are Russian orphans. Now I've been a camp counselor all right, and I was a boy okay, I've been in locker rooms you know. But the smelliest people were the orphans that we that we got to know that we loved, that we helped and supported. Thanks to some generous donations, we were able to upgrade their bathing system. Once a week, on Sunday, they would shower and then get their new set of clothes – one set – for the week. Then, on Sunday, they would bathe and get their clothes washed and they would have a new set of clothes and start the week over. We hung out with them, we loved them, and Jesus was right there loving them as well.

In a metaphorical sense God; and actually maybe a literal sense; God is calling us to be with those who find it difficult to shower, or to care for themselves. Those are the people that Jesus calls friends and loves and he is calling us to them.

The last piece, and you know it's hard for me to do a sermon without mentioning the word Greek, so you're going to get a bit of a Greek lesson. The last part is if you're still having difficulty with Jesus saying *if you love me you will do these things, if you love me you'll love God, if you love me you will love your neighbors as yourself, if you love me you will love those who I love* if you're having difficulty with the word “if” it is a difficult word for us to translate from Greek. Ean is the is the word itself and it's not easy to translate into English. There's another work that is difficult for us to translate. The word is Kai. We would spell it k-a-i. Kai can translate into “but” or “and”. Greek does not have a difference between but or and. *I would do this but I have to do this first or, I will do this and I have to do this first.* Kai is the word but in English we have two entirely different meanings. There's a way that Greek writers can stack the words together for the reader or the hearer to know which one it is; but in English, we have “but” and “and”. So anytime in any of these gospel lessons, anything from the New Testament, where you read the word *and or but* it is the same word, It takes one of us to translate that for you.

The same confusion comes down to the word “if” because another word we could use in English – “since”. If you love me. Since you love me. Both use the word “ean”. Which one did Jesus mean? We could easily translate today's Gospel passage with “Since you love me, you will love God...” Since you love me, you will love your neighbors as yourself. Since you love me you will love those who I love. These are not toxic words. Jesus is not calling us into a toxic relationship with him or with one another. Jesus is talking about loving him and then not forgetting about everything else around you. We aren't called into a relationship just to love Jesus alone and to drop our responsibility to our families to our societies and to God.

Since we love Jesus, we then automatically or naturally flow our love into God, flow our love into others around us. And in particular Jesus, said *Since you love me I am sending you the Holy Spirit. I'm sending you another Advocate that will help you with this. And that that Advocate is love. It lives in you; it lives around you; and it lives in others. That Advocate is what will help you as you serve and help one another.*

So as we head into yet another political season with toxicity all around us, Jesus is saying since you love me you will continue to love others around you. We are heading into a time with a border crisis and sixty thousand migrants asking to be received into this country. Some of them have not had a shower in a long time. We are being called into loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves and somehow figuring out how all of those things work together. We are called into living into this love from all of those people in our community; the people that we love and the ones that we're naturally attracted to; and the people that we find natural friendship with and also the people who Jesus calls friends. The people that will take an act of the Holy Spirit from outside of us to help us love. And, like how I can turn my heart and follow Trixie [Call the Midwife] and her wedding, which was kind of a disaster, that when we can do that out of love, that same spirit will help us love others around us.

We don't have to complete it today. We don't have to have it done tomorrow, but God is inviting us into this path, into this way of living with him, the way that our mothers loved us – even on days when we were stinky both in behavior and in body – and they still loved us. We are invited into that love for those around us and especially those who Jesus calls friends, In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.