

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today's Gospel drops us right into the middle of a moment—and if we don't slow down, we'll miss what's actually happening. This scene was the night before the Passover. Jesus washed his disciples' feet. He named that one of them will betray him. He told them that he is leaving. So, the disciples were sitting in a moment filled with uncertainty, fear, and confusion. They didn't know what comes next. They didn't know who to trust. They didn't even fully understand what Jesus was trying to tell them. This was not a calm, reflective moment. This was the moment where everything felt like it was falling apart.

And into that moment, Jesus said something that was hard to hear. He said, "If you love me..." That "if" sounds like a test. Like something we must prove. And the truth is, that's how most of us have been taught to think about religion. More rules. More expectations. More things we "must," "should," and "have to" do. We learn to ask: Who's in? Who's out? What's biblical? Who belongs? But, Jesus names the question underneath all of this: do we want to be right... or do we want to be in relationship?

Far too often—we choose being right. And it's not just something theoretical or "out there." Rather, it shows up in real ways—in the life of the church and in our daily lives. Sometimes it shows up in conversations that don't go the way we hoped. A comment that lands wrong. A decision we don't agree with. Something that doesn't sit right. And maybe we don't say anything. We tell ourselves it's not worth it or it'll just make things worse. But, truthfully, we

don't let it go. We carry it. We replay it. We avoid the conversation. We build a story in our own minds. And that story starts to feel justified. Over time, something shifts—often quietly, slowly— and we start to pull back. The relationship doesn't break, but it changes. We say less. We share less. We stop giving the benefit of the doubt. And before long, the connection that once felt natural, feels strained. And before long, we're no longer asking how to stay connected. We're just holding on to what we know we're right about. And we can feel the shift.

And this example is something most of us can relate to, because love is harder than being right. Rules feel safer. Certainty feels stronger. And being in relationship is messy. It's easier to draw a line than it is to stay connected.

So, when we hear Jesus say, "If you love me..." we hear pressure. We hear expectation. We hear the fear that we might not measure up. But that's not what Jesus is doing here. He said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." And the commandment is... love one another. That's it. Not a list. Not a hierarchy. Not a set of conditions. Simply, love one another.

And this is where we get it wrong. We hear it as a condition: love first and then you belong. But that's not what Jesus says. Jesus is not setting a bar. Jesus is revealing a reality—not something you have to achieve, but something you are already living inside of. Jesus said, "I am in you, and you are in me." In that statement you already belong. You are already loved. God is not waiting for you to prove anything. Which means—even when you don't get it right, you are still held in that love. God is with you. God is present. God is already at work.

So this isn't about earning love. This is what life in God's love looks like. And that changes everything. Because love is not just one command among many. Love is the center. You don't have to create it. Even when you don't feel it. Even when you don't see it. Even when everything feels uncertain. Because that's exactly the moment Jesus is speaking into. A moment of fear. A moment of confusion. A moment where nothing feels secure. And he didn't say, "Get it right." He said, "Love one another." Not as a test, but as a way of life. Not as a condition, but as a reality.

So the question becomes: Does this love? In the conversations we're having, the decisions we're making, the ways we're showing up with one another. Because at the end of the day, faith isn't proven in what we believe to be true. It's revealed in love. For, as Diana Butler Bass puts it, "Love lasts. Love is the point. Love is the way, the truth, and [the] life... And it is always with us. Indeed, that's a promise."¹ And we are not alone in that love. As Jesus promised, we are not left as orphans. Christ is with us—and the Spirit is with us—guiding us, accompanying us, holding us in that love even now. And in that promise, we are drawn into new life—not someday, but now. That is Easter living: not just a day, but a way of being in the world. So may we live in that love—today, and in the days to come. Amen.

¹ https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/sunday-musings-12c?utm_campaign=email-half-post&r=3gfv3&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email