



Queen Anne

LUTHERAN CHURCH

Called to Proclaim God's Love in Christ for Every Person

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✂ *Staff* ✂

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Sexton	John Bryant
Lutheran Counseling Network	Sarah Tatterson

✂ *In Worship Today* ✂

Pastor	The Rev. Dr. Daniel Peterson
Cantor	Kyle Haugen
Lector	Bob Whitehorn

This service of worship can also be heard online. Go to queenannelutheran.org and click on "WORD OUT" to find both audio and print resources for worship at home.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 17, 2020

"Word Out #11 *audio transcript*

Prelude To a Wild Rose (from *Ten Woodland Sketches*, Op. 51, No. 1)
Edward MacDowell (1860-1908)

Welcome

P: Welcome, this sixth Sunday of Easter. Wherever you are listening, we invite you into this space: one where we will hear the good news in proclamation, spoken and sung, a time when you can be still and know God is God.

P: Jesus does not abandon his followers. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus comes to abide with his disciples of every generation. As Pentecost draws near, we are reminded that the risen Christ dwells in us as the Spirit of truth. We receive this Spirit in baptism and pray that in our gathering virtually, even while we are apart, we will be transformed into the body of the risen Christ in and for others in the world.

Greeting


P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.

Gospel Acclamation

John 14:23

C: 
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Repeat alleluia

P: 
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them,
and we will come to them and make our home with them.

C: 
Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.


Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

A: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the fourteenth chapter.

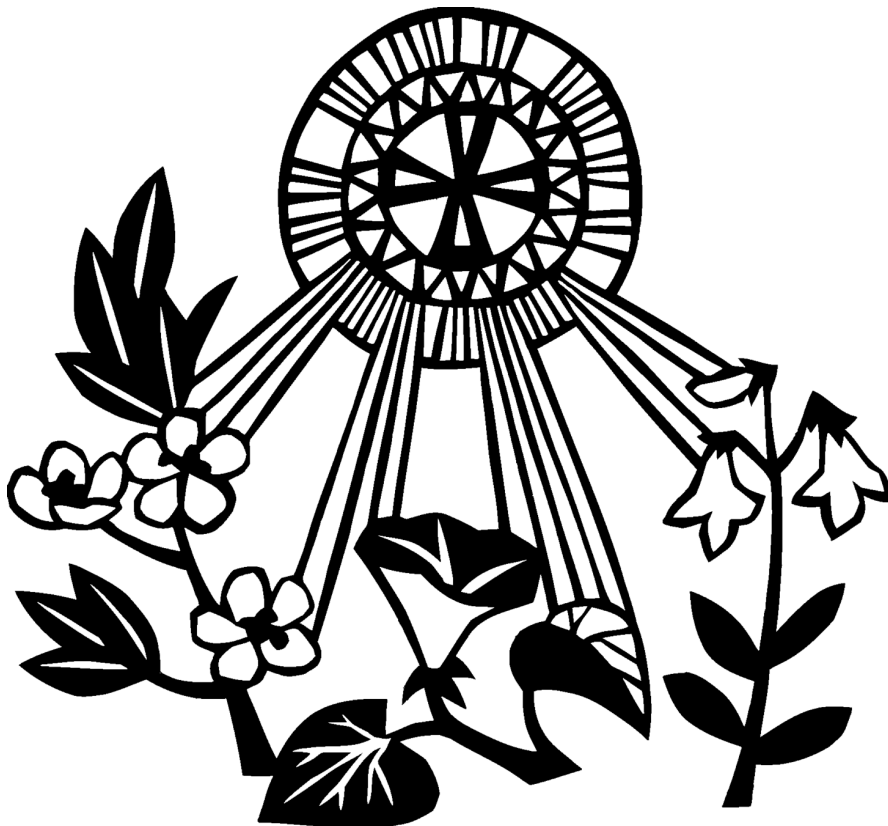
G: Glory to you, O Lord.

[Jesus said to his disciples:] ¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

A: The Gospel of the Lord.

G: Praise to you, O Christ.



One of the most problematic verses in all 27 books of the New Testament, at least from a Lutheran perspective, occurs at the end of our Gospel reading for today.

According to John 14:21, Jesus tells his followers that those who possess and keep his commandments are the ones who love him, and those who love him will be loved in return by God.

Nothing here sounds unusual at first glance. Jesus merely says that if a person loves him and does what he asks, he (and the Father) will love that person in response. It's simple *quid pro quo*, right? Perform good deeds or "works" for Jesus on *this* side of the grave, and he will reward you with eternal life on *the other side* of the grave.

Unfortunately, at least according to the Apostle Paul, that's not how God saves human beings. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes this clear: "For by *grace* you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast." Salvation, in other words, comes about not by way of performing good deeds. It's not a reward. There is no bargaining, no *quid pro quo*, no "I do this for you, and you do this for me." It's grace all the way down: through the waters of baptism God claims you from the beginning. God's love sustains you throughout this life, and it accompanies you even through death. Nothing can separate you from it (Romans 8:38). From start to finish, God loves you no matter what.

You can see, then, why John 14:21 is problematic. Salvation, Jesus seems to be suggesting, is not a gift – it's a reward. Keep his commandments and do what is right. God will pay you back in return.

Of course, salvation by works is not the only problem here. When Jesus mentions his commandments and the necessity of following them, he leaves out one minor detail: he never tells us what these commandments are!

We can assume he's not simply referring to the ten commandments God gave Moses. Nor is he likely referring to the additional 603 commandments of the Old Testament. He speaks, rather, of *his* commandments, but what on earth (or in

heaven) does he mean? Matthew, Mark, and Luke never list them, nor do any of the other writings in the New Testament.

To summarize, John 14:21 poses a challenge. Jesus not only tells us that if we are to be saved we must follow his commandments, contradicting the Apostle Paul. He also never indicates what they are! Talk about a pickle. As Han Solo says to his co-pilot Chewbacca in *The Empire Strikes Back*, "I don't know how we're gonna get out of this one!"

So *how do we* make sense of John 14:21, its apparent claim that salvation comes by *earning* God's love, and Jesus' strange talk of following commandments he never enumerates or specifies? To answer the second of these questions first, we need to look more closely at the Gospel of John itself, which is exactly what my friend Pastor Mark Griffith of St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Bellevue did three years ago, the last time this text appeared in our common lectionary.

Pastor Mark identified commands Jesus gave to those around him beginning with the first chapter of John's Gospel, and guess what? He found 34 of them!

Some were routine: Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well, "Give me a drink" (John 4:7).

Others were uplifting. "Do not let your hearts be troubled," Jesus says to his disciples shortly before his death, "believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1)

Others were provocative, including one that appears in what Pastor Mark calls Jesus' "temple tantrum": "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace" (John 2:16).

Still others were profound: "unbind him," he says of Lazarus to those who were gathered outside of his tomb," a commandment implying that we *all* have work to do in the business of new life! It's not just Jesus.

And yet, among all these demands Jesus makes of his disciples and the community around him, Pastor Mark found only one commandment Jesus names explicitly as *his* commandment. Can you guess what it is? He says it twice, first in John 13:34: "I have given you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Again, it appears in John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Love one another as I have loved you. Now let's bring back the Apostle Paul to illustrate how he and Jesus actually agree. Notice how Jesus doesn't say in John 13:34, "You, my disciples, loved me and now I love you in return." He says, in a manner of speaking, "I loved you first. My love is prior to yours, and my love will always be for you. Now in response to my love, love others."

Is that not exactly what we read from Ephesians? God's love is pure gift. It brought you into being, it renewed you in the waters of baptism, it has sustained you throughout this life, and it will hold on to you even through death. It came first. What now are you going to do? Think about what happens when you receive a gift. You *thank* the one who gave it to you, and if it's a really good gift, it can put you in the mood to do good things for others.

The true Christian, in fact, can barely contain her or himself. So writes Martin Luther. "If faith is there, [the follower of Christ] cannot hold back; he proves himself, breaks out into good works, confesses and teaches this gospel before the people, and stakes his life on it. Everything that he lives and does is directed to his neighbor's profit . . . to help him That is what Christ meant when at the last he gave no other commandment than love, by which men were to know who were his disciples and true believers. For where works and love do not break forth, there faith is not right, the gospel does not yet take hold, and Christ is not rightly known" (*Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 2ed., p. 111).

You are loved by God. You are claimed by God. Everything you have comes from God. Now go. Be grateful. Love and serve others as God in Christ has loved and served you.

Our present circumstances provide you and me with plenty of ways to serve others, and the world needs us now more than ever. I start local. Our Friday email to the congregation provides instructions for donating food or toiletries to Queen Anne Helpline or a water bottle to a young person at the New Horizons shelter in Belltown. Consider that. Next, I look for ways to help people I know. I console a friend who has recently lost her job; I send a card to a fellow church member who lives alone like I do; I call someone who is experiencing bereavement. And then, I try to contribute in small ways beyond my experience in Seattle. I go to the website of the ELCA (www.elca.org) and donate to its

COVID-19 relief fund. Obviously, there are many other ways to give and serve. Just go and do it.

Yes, it's true: John 14:21 at first glance is one of the most problematic verses in the New Testament. Upon closer inspection, however, it's not much of a problem at all. When Jesus tells his followers to love him by doing what he commands, *they already know* he loves them (John 13:34). They already know he chose them (John 15:16). They already know his love comes first. The question is, do we know that for ourselves?

Once we do, only one thing remains. It's the final command Jesus gives in today's Gospel. "Follow me," he remarks in John 21:19. "I love you," he could just as well be saying, "go now and love others."

Amen.

Hymn of the Day
(see next page)

Blessed Assurance
ELW 638

Blessed Assurance

1 Bless-ed as-sur-ance, Je-sus is mine! Oh, what a fore-taste of glo-ry di-vine!
2 Per-fect sub-mis-sion, per-fect de-light, vi-sions of rap-ture now burst on my sight;
3 Per-fect sub-mis-sion, all is at rest; I in my Sav-ior am hap-py and blest,

Heir of sal-va-tion, pur-chase of God, born of his Spir-it, washed in his blood.
an-gels de-scend-ing bring from a-bove ech-oes of mer-cy, whis-pers of love.
watch-ing and wait-ing, look-ing a-bove, filled with his good-ness, lost in his love.

Refrain

This is my sto-ry, this is my song, prais-ing my Sav-ior all the day long:

this is my sto-ry, this is my song, prais-ing my Sav-ior all the day long.

Prayers of the Church

P: Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

P: Abiding God, you have revealed yourself to us in the form of your Son, Jesus Christ. Embolden your church, as your followers, to reveal your love to everyone in our speaking and in our living. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: You are the creator of heaven and earth. Revitalize the health of oceans, rivers, lakes, springs, glaciers, and other bodies of water that give life to your creatures, including Puget Sound. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: You call all people of the world your children. Judge the nations justly, show mercy to the oppressed, and speak truth to power through your prophets. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: You come near to us when we are lost, and you hear our distress. We pray for those who suffer in any way. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: Your commands are good and merciful. Give us courage to work for justice, advocate for the voiceless, and free the oppressed and imprisoned in body, mind, or spirit. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

P: For who else do the people of God pray?

A silence is given so that your prayers may be offered.

P: Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

- P:** You remain with us always, O God, and your kingdom has no end. We remember the saints who have gone before us. Unite us forever in your final victory over death. Lord, in your mercy,
- C:** **hear our prayer.**
- P:** With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord.
- C:** **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

- P:** Lord remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.
- C:** **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen.**

Announcements

- P:** We thank you for joining us for this service. If you would like to hear other services or access the newest edition of *the Quill*, we invite you to go to our website at queenannelutheran.org.

Benediction

A: Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

P: Almighty God, the Father, † the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.

Dismissal

P: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Sonata II for Organ (Op. 65, No. 2)
3. Allegro maestoso e vivace
Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847)

