

10 May 2026
Easter 6

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Filled with the Life and Love of God”
Text: John 14:15-21; 1 Peter 3:13-22; Acts 17:16-31

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We just heard Jesus say, ***If you love me, you will keep my commandments.***

If you weren't in church, you might think that was a father or mother speaking to their child. Maybe they wouldn't use the word *commandments*, but keep the rules, do your chores, things like that. But do them in love, not just because you have to. And not just because it's Mother's Day! But every day.

Because we sometimes (maybe often times?) keep rules or do chores *without* love. Fine! I'll clean my room - then slam the door. Set the table by slamming the plates and glasses down on it. There! Happy? No. The chore was done but lacking love, *it really wasn't*. It wasn't a loving service to your family. And no one is happy.

Old Testament Israel fell into this kind of rule keeping from time to time. They would offer sacrifices, but were just going through the motions. Their heart wasn't in it, and they just wanted to get it over with so they could go back to business and doing what they wanted to do. And God said: *I don't want sacrifices like that. Don't bother.*

Sometimes we keep rules not out of obligation but out of fear. We don't speed for fear of getting a speeding ticket. We do what the police say because we fear getting arrested if we don't. But keeping *the commandments* out of fear - so I don't get in trouble with God or get thrown into hell - is not what God wants either. It doesn't work anyway. Maybe you can avoid the speed traps and the IRS audits and get away with breaking the law in the world, *but God sees everything*. And while doing the right thing but for the wrong reason might be good enough for the world, and keep you out of trouble and out of prison, it's not good enough for God. For God isn't just about the doing, but *about the heart*.

So, Jesus says, ***If you love me, you will keep my commandments.***

Keeping the commandments is all about love. They are about loving God and loving our neighbor. If we could love perfectly, we would automatically keep all the commandments, for the commandments are what love looks like. The commandments are what the love in our hearts looks like when it comes out in what we do. So when our love is wrong, or when our love wanes, keeping the commandments goes with it. Sin is lack of love, or maybe better to say, lack of the *right* love. We serve what we love, whether that's a person (including myself!), a thing, or a sin.

But as important as all that is - and loving and doing the good works of the commandments *is* important to God - it is what comes next in what Jesus says that is *more* important. For it is what enables us to keep the commandments - not because we have to and not in fear - but in love, as God wants us to keep them.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans . . .

Now, Jesus *doesn't* send the Spirit *because* we love and keep the commandments, but *so that* we will. The Spirit as ***the Helper***. To help us so we will not be orphans - on our own with no one to help. ***He will dwell with you and be in you.*** Jesus calls Him ***the the Spirit of truth***. For He will teach us the truth. The truth that our love is lacking, or wrong, and so we do not keep the commandments as we should. And the truth that Jesus did. That in His perfect love He kept the commandments perfectly for us. And the Spirit not only teaches us that, and gives us the faith to believe that, but is constantly *pointing* us to Jesus and constantly *connecting* us to Jesus, that His love - His perfect love - live in us. The love we need. That our love be right.

AND giving us the forgiveness we need for our lack of love and our wrong love and our failure to keep the commandments in love. That forgiveness is why ***in a little while*** - mere hours from when Jesus said this, in fact - ***they will see Jesus no more.*** He will be sealed in the tomb. For in His perfect love, He is going to the cross to lay down His life in love. His life for our life. So that ***when they see Him again***, after His resurrection, ***they will live because He lives.*** They will live a new life. A life filled with His love. And filled with his love, a life then also of good works, of keeping His commandments.

As orphans, on our own, we could never do that. Sin has disordered our lives and our love. Even our best works are tainted with sin, are not good enough (Isaiah 64:6). But Jesus does ***not leave us as orphans.*** He comes to us. He comes to us in the

preaching of His Word of truth. He comes to us in the water of Baptism which, as Peter said, *saves us* by washing us from the inside out. He comes to us in the word of Absolution which forgives and cleanses us and gives us **a good conscience**. And He comes to us in His Body and Blood which forgives, feeds and strengthens us. In all these ways Jesus comes to us with His forgiveness and love to fill us with them. That with *rightly ordered* lives and loves, that as sons of God in the Son of God, that with God as our Father in Jesus, we love as He loves and live as He lives.

That's the work of the Spirit in us.

And that is **the reason for the hope that is in us**, as Peter talked about. Some people think that when Peter says you should **always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you**, that means we have to be able to answer every question people might ask you. But I think that is a rare person who can do that! (Maybe as rare as a sparkly unicorn!) Rather, **our hope is Jesus**. Jesus' perfect life and love. Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus sending the Spirit as our Helper. Jesus' forgiveness of our sins. Jesus' promise that because He lives, we will live. We will rise from death to life with Him. *That's* our hope. *That's* what people need to hear. Just give 'em Jesus! Tell them of Jesus.

That's our hope, though Peter also says, it might be a reason for suffering.

For when we speak of our hope, of Jesus, with regard to life, sexuality, marriage, fathers, mothers, families, and other hot-button issues in a godly way, and also the truth of the one and only true God, there will be those who disagree with us and so oppose us and persecute us. Sometimes harshly. Which is hard. But if such suffering drives us to our knees, drives us to prayer, drives us to the Word, drives us to Jesus, then, as Peter said, it is good. God *uses* it for our good. It isn't pleasant, but it is good.

And that God can use suffering for good, **the cross** is our proof; exhibit number one. For there God used the greatest suffering for the greatest good.

And the cross is **the altar of the known God**. In Athens, as we heard in the First Reading today, they had **the altar to the unknown god**. But the cross reveals God to us; makes Him **known** to us in a way nothing else can! For there we see how much He loves us. There we see His glory, that He uses His strength to serve and to save. There we see how much He gives up for us and how much He wants us as His children. What the people of Athens did not know, we do! And so Paul gave them **a reason for the hope that was in Him**.

That's what we do now, too. Mothers to their children; fathers, too. To friends and neighbors and co-workers. Why do you do what you do? Why do you live how you

live? Why do you forgive? Because of the life and love given us by Jesus that now lives in us. The life and love of Jesus given us by the Spirit who Jesus has sent to be with us always. The Spirit which is not a power or a thing, but the very God living in us.

So in the Collect of the Day we prayed earlier, we prayed: *O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration - that is, by Your Holy Spirit - grant that we may think those things that are right - and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them.* That with Your Spirit, we may have rightly ordered lives and loves, do those things that He commands, and always be ready to confess our hope.

Which is what we will do in the closing hymn today. Confess that my hope is not in me or what I can do. Not in my obedience, my dedication, my good works, my love, or anything else in me! Because I fall short, and always will. My hope is that *Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]* Yes, *Jesus lives! The victory's won! This shall be my confidence!* (LSB #490) Now, and forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.