

## “The Promise of the Holy Spirit”

John 14: 15-21

We continue this week with the same chapter in the Gospel of John. As we remember from last week, in this chapter, Jesus is gathered with his disciples in the upper room, realizing that his time here on earth was drawing to a close. Last week, as part of our Scripture, we read how Jesus shared words of wisdom with the disciples to alleviate their fears, words of comfort and hope to strengthen them for the journey ahead. And this week, as we continue our reading in this chapter of John, we hear more about the promise of the Holy Spirit. We hear more about this promise through the second part of Jesus’ speech. This part of the speech is the “action” part of his speech, the “Now what” part of Jesus’ speech, the “now what we do we do since Jesus has taken away all our fears” part of the speech.

Like any good leader and teacher, Jesus realizes that it is hard to motivate people when they are afraid. It is hard to get people excited about their calling when they are so worried about their own needs. It is hard to inspire people when they aren’t really listening to the speech that is being given because they are so caught up in the details that are being shared that everything else just gets closed off and shut down, and all people can comprehend is fear.

Jesus realizes that he must calm the disciples' fears before they will ever be ready and excited about the journeys ahead of them. And that is exactly what he does in his farewell address to the disciples that we read as our Scripture last week.

And now this week, our reading is Jesus' plan for action for the disciples. Jesus continues talking to his disciples and he lays out the plan. And it is so simple and straightforward. Jesus gives his disciples the keys to the kingdom with just a few words and thankfully because John wrote them down, we also have a chance to receive these keys to the kingdom as well.

Jesus' Big Plan of action, our call as disciples, our mission as the church all boils down to...Are you ready for it? "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." See it's simple! There are no ifs, ands or buts. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." There are no caveats-"If you love me, then keep my commandments. In this big plan of action, there are no conditions, such as "if you love me enough, you will keep my commandments." In this call as disciples, there are no gray areas, no wiggle room such as "If you love me you will keep my commandments except when it is not convenient for you as believers." This plan is not based on fear or punishment. It is not based on us worrying about how much we need to do to make Jesus love us or like us.

The plan is so simple. The calling is so simple. The mission is so simple that as we are sitting here today, we may find ourselves asking and wondering, Can it

be that simple? We may find ourselves beginning to wonder if it is not just a little too simple for the journeys ahead. And then we realize that as soon as we do this, as soon as we begin to wonder about the simplicity of this plan, we have opened the door once more to allow fear to creep in again. Yes, the “what ifs” may begin racing through our minds once again. The “there has to be a catch here somewhere” mentality may be taking over even as we sit here today but we need to realize that as soon as we start this way of thinking and begin acting this way, we will close ourselves off to Jesus’ words of comfort and hope once more.

so in order to help us calm our fears and to get excited about the journey ahead of us, just like the disciples that night in the upper room we need to hear Jesus’ words once more and realize and embrace the knowledge that Jesus won’t leave us in this dark reality. Jesus won’t let fear be in control. That Jesus is here offering us comfort and strength for the journey once more.

In our Scripture today, He reminds his disciples and us today as modern day believers that there is good news. That we know something that this world does not know: God’s grace and God’s love. Grace that welcomes and embrace. Love that transforms and heals. Grace that nourishes. Love that is unconditional. Grace and Love that were shown to us even before we encountered and embraced God.

The good news that We know as believers, as ones who have experienced the risen Christ, is that the darkness is not in control. God is. And we know, we’ve

experienced and we have realized the promise that God has given us so much more than this world with its promises of riches, power, might ever could. We have been given gifts by God as God's very own. No ifs ands or buts. No conditions to earn these gifts. No caveats to ownership of these gifts. No need to worry about punishment or fear to earn these gifts. These are Gifts that come in the form of God's grace and God's love. These are Gifts that were ours when we were being formed in the womb. These are Gifts that will be ours always.

No ifs and or buts because that is the way God works. God never says to us, I'll love you if you love me first. God never says to us, I'll love you only if you love me first. God never says to us, I'll love you only if you do as I say to do.

No the Good news is that God says, "I am your God, slow to anger, showing steadfast love for all generations, faithful for all time." No ifs ands or buts. Jesus knows all these things when he lays out his simple plan of action and now it is his mission, his calling to remind us of these things. Jesus knows that his plan of action really is as simple as it seems because of the gifts of God's grace and God's love, gifts that are already ours in the first place.

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So in this part of his speech, the good news is that Jesus is calling us to remember as his disciples that we proclaim that there is something more, something more that this world can never give us, something more that this world does not understand: God's grace and God's love, love that heals us, grace that transform us, no strings, no conditions. And he wants us to remember that the even better news for us is that both God's love and God's grace changes us and forces us to open our eyes to God's kingdom here on earth and invites us to see ways that we can participate in this promise of peace and wholeness here on earth.

That's really the good news of us! But Jesus also wants us to remember that this good news does not come without its challenges. Jesus is reminding us that God's grace and God's love doesn't end with us as individuals. They connect us as the Body of Christ. And we as Jesus' disciples, know that as the Body of Christ here on earth, we are called to share and live out our mission by expressing it the best way possible and that way is to keep Jesus' words to us as his believers through our actions, through our words, through our deeds.

This plan of action that Jesus lays out for his disciples and for us is so simple but it challenges us as well because it pushes us out of our comfort zones, it calls for us to open our eyes and truly see ourselves as God created us to be, to truly see each other as brothers and sisters connected as one, to truly see all of God's children as named and claimed as God's own.

We have a clear directive about how we are called to live and act as Jesus' disciples: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments". No ifs ands or buts. We have been given Jesus' teachings to guide us and to lead us. We have been given Jesus' example of servant leadership to shape us and to direct us. We have been given the gift of God's grace and God's love to lead our actions and our deeds.

Wonderful knowledge for us as believers but even we will admit that sometimes this challenge seems to be too overwhelming. And the good news is that Jesus knew all of this as well when he was sharing his farewell speech that night in the upper room. That is why he gave us the promise of the Holy Spirit. That is why he gave us a reminder that God will never leave us alone. That is why he gave us a starting point for our journeys.

And this is our starting point for the journey ahead. Jesus wants us to remember all of these things as we begin to ask ourselves: are we going to be open to the challenge of sharing God's love and grace with a world that is hurting and broken? are we going to embrace a world that would rather ignore the good news than believe that God could care about it? are we going to make the church relevant today?

The good news is that we are not left alone to do this mission on our own, to bring this plan of action into fruition on our own. We have the promise of the Holy

Spirit and we have the Body of Christ supporting us, walking beside us. Jesus has taken away the fears and today we are called to figure out the next step. We are called to embrace the “Now what” part of the plan. We have everything need already. We have God’s grace. We have God’s love. We have the Holy Spirit guiding us and leading us. Now what?

Are we up for the challenge? Are we ready for the possibilities that lay ahead? we are a part of something much bigger than ourselves. We are part of the Body of Christ that has been given a plan of action: “if you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

And the challenge for us today as believers is to allow these words to sink in and to embrace their meaning for us as disciples because when we do, we realize that we have been changed for the good. we realize that the fear has left us again and we will start to get a little excited about the possibilities of ministry that are presenting themselves to us as people of God. we will realize that we are a part of a new creation. we will realize that we have the promise of the Holy Spirit and that we have been given hope, we have been given strength for the journey ahead, we have been given a renewed vision and mission as people of faith. We have everything we need to become the people that God created us to be. No ifs ands or buts.

The challenge for us today is that We are called to remember all that we have learned about Jesus Christ and share it with the people we meet. We are called to go out into the world and heal the hurting. We are called to be the living voice of God in our turbulent world today. We are called to welcome all to the Table. We are called to be the Body of Christ, living out God's love for one another, supporting one another, and sharing God's grace with one another. No ifs ands or buts.

That's the way God's love works. That's the way God's grace works. That's the way God's Kingdom works. We know this. We've experienced this. Now are we ready to go and share that love and follow Jesus' commandments as his disciples.

If we love him, we will keep his commandments.

May we always embrace this directive and have the courage for the journey ahead, knowing that the Holy Spirit is guiding us and leading us as Jesus' disciples. Amen.