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Scripture: John 14: 15-27

Sermon Title: Love and Obedience

John 14:15-27

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

15 “If you love me, you will keep[a] my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate,[b] to be with you forever. 17 This 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[c] in[d] you.

18 “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19 In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21 They 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.” 22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?” 23 Jesus answered him, “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. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words, and the word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me.

25 “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate,[e] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. This is the Word of the Lord.....

Please pray with me.

In our Lenten book study on Surrender to Love by David Benner, we are ready to explore chapter 3, which centers on the topic of love and obedience. As I began to read this chapter, I have to say I was a little resistant to the focus on obedience as an aspect of our relationship with God.

The word obedience for me brings up memories of childhood when we often navigate our lives by trying to stay obedient. As a Christian kid who tried for the most part to follow the rules, I naturally think of obedience as the goal I had in following the direction of my parents, the teachings of the church, and the guidance of my teachers at school. As a kid, everyone seems to be asking for obedience. People determine whether you are a good kid or bad kid by how obedient you are to those who are older than you and in authority.

As we grow up, the word obedience may be heard less often, but it is common within specific environments. For example, my understanding is that in both the military and in law enforcement,

obedience to your commanding officer or military commander is required and enforced.

In other work environments, we are asked to follow protocols and to have good work ethics. We sometimes experience a strict supervisor who uses the word obedience, but generally that word is not as common.

So, in relationship to God, I wonder if obedience is a helpful focus or not. Although I agree we should obey God in our lives, I am initially cautious about this focus by David Benner in his book.

The good news though is that he paints a very nice understanding of what obedience to God really looks like. In our Scripture passage today from John 14 and in Benner's chapter, we see that obedience is really born out of a healthy relationship with God that is loving and safe.

In John 14, Jesus talks about how we show love to God by keeping the commandments. This is a form of obedience to God's kingdom

values. The two greatest commandments that Jesus asks us to live by are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is how Jesus describes what obedience looks like. Keeping the commandment of love of God, others, and ourselves is what it means to obey God. And in our passage today, we are told that the Holy Spirit is given to followers of Jesus. The Holy Spirit will be the spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit will be in us and will not leave us orphaned. The beautiful thing is that the Holy Spirit is the one who also gives us grace, the strength to follow the commandment of love. As we surrender to love, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk in love, which is the vision of what obedience is all about in God's eyes.

Obedience is not about willpower or being perfect all the time. It is the fruit of a life of grace and love. And if we struggle to walk in love, God encourages us to relax and through grace and forgiveness to keep on the journey of learning to rest in God's love. For God

obedience is not a stressful form of effort, but a natural fruit of learning to live in love and faithfulness to God's values of love.

David Benner has a beautiful metaphor for surrender and obedience that at first might surprise us. He tells the story of learning to teach a group of people to swim. As many swim teachers will tell you, part of the key to learning to swim is first learning how to float. This group of people Benner was teaching to swim, learned quite quickly because they were spiritual directors. As spiritual directors they already understood the principle of trust and surrender, so they caught on fairly quickly to resting in the water on their backs as they learned to float. Benner does mention one woman who needed some extra help to learn to float. Here is his reflection on teaching her.

“One of the woman in the group of spiritual directors who were learning to swim did have a problem. Her biggest challenge was letting go of seeing where she was. She was afraid that while she was floating she might run into something, so she kept lifting her

head out of the water to look around. Each time she did so, she began to sink.

So it is with us. We need to stop searching and see that we are surrounded by the Sea of Perfect Love. But we also need to stop our panicky thrashing about in an effort to float. Paradoxically, our efforts to stay afloat usually lead to sinking. Every time we start to panic and think we need to do something to stay afloat, we lift our head out of the water and no longer rest in it. As soon as we do we begin to sink. Our efforts to stay afloat may keep our head above the water for a while, but eventually we tire, and eventually our efforts to keep afloat will drown us.”

You will notice in your bulletin an image of a person floating in the water. For me, this image reminds me of the presence of the Holy Spirit, who teaches us how to float and put our trust in God.

(Share story of experience during the pandemic with listening to meditations on resting in God’s love. One was done by Koya Webb, a

spirituality teacher who lives in CA. Share story of meditation on connecting with Mother Nature- image of Holy Spirit).

Obedience is about surrendering to the person of the Holy Spirit. As we surrender to the Holy Spirit, we also learn how to be healthy in our care for people in our lives. Surrender and obedience are not about obligation but opportunity, they are not about following rules but living by love. As Benner writes,

“Too often people see Christianity in terms of rules and morality—a system of obligations and prohibitions. The entirely misses the point of Christ-following. Christian obedience is more like what lovers give each other than what soldiers give their superiors. Lovers demonstrate their love by doing what each other wants. And so it should be with Christians and their God.”

Today, we are celebrating the 136th birthday of our church. As I hear stories about our church over the many decades that we have existed in Newberg, one common thread is the way people showed

love to one another and faithful obedience to what God called them to do in our town. Our church has faithfully served Christ here and has been a home for thousands of people over the years. Take a moment and imagine the generations of people who have experienced the presence of God our Creator, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit through all the years this church has accompanied people. Think of how many families and individuals were supported by this church. Reflect on how many children, youth, and adults first met Jesus here. God is so good and worthy of our surrender and obedience. We seek to follow our God not in our will power, nor in our perfect, but through the grace and presence of the Holy Spirit, who is love and only love, grace and only grace.

We can rest in the presence of God's love. We can float in the Living Water that is the Holy Spirit. Our obedience can be a natural growth of our experience of God's love rather than a burden that we carry.

As we love God, we can follow the commandments of love and walk by grace in alignment with God's heart.

How exciting to surrender to Love in this way!

Let us pray...