



“Tough Love”

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Scripture (NRSV):

John 14:15-21

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, 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 among 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.”

Sermon:

Who is this? Why does Jesus talk this way?

In the ancient world of this gospel, the great person whose story was being told, would retell, in short form, their message, their life, their work in a “farewell discourse”.

Jesus is speaking in this form, laying out in these few chapters, all that has been spoken and done in all the previous chapters.

It’s not like you or I would talk or write this way, but for the gospel of John, it was necessary and acceptable and appropriate.

So Jesus is at table, after their Passover meal, and he reminds his followers and friends who he is and to whom he is connected:

Jesus,

1. The One who is one with the Father. (14:11)
2. The One who was present in the Beginning, as the Word of God. (1:1)
3. The One who does great works and promises great works for those who follow. (14:12)
4. The One who raises the dead. (11:43)
5. The One who acts as servant, as slave for others, by washing their feet and calling on them to do the same. (13:5)
6. The One who gives a new commandment of love. (13:44)
7. The One who sends the Encourager, the Helper, the Advocate. (14:15)
8. The One who promises life to those who believe. (14:19)
9. The One who calls us to keep the commandments of Jesus. (14:21)

And do you know Jesus' commandments? It's not complex: To love him, and through that love, to love God.

And the promise from Jesus, is that God loves you in return.

In my preaching and teaching it may seem that I talk about love a lot.

In our society, love has been so muddled with sex, and with romance, that it may seem nonsensical to hear about love from Jesus.

So, make no mistake, Jesus is not talking about romantic love, or sexual attraction, or even parent/child love.

Jesus is talking about a very tough love.

The love Jesus models is both powerful enough to heal, to raise from the dead, to forgive others of terrible deeds...and humble enough to wash another person's feet, and give one's life for another.

Jesus' love is tough enough to stand in the face of corruption, of evil...and call it out. (18:20)

Jesus' love is tough enough to see into the hearts of others, find their true motives, their real story, whether it is a story of brokenness or a story of bitterness, fear, heartbreak. Jesus' love is great enough to trust in the wisdom of God.

Do we have an inkling of what it takes to show that kind of love? That kind of strength? The discipline to give your heart, your life energy, your time...to the world...in the name of the

love of God?

It's not complicated, but it isn't easy.

But if we choose, it can be our life work, and we are not alone in it. Jesus promised both the Spirit of God as comforter, advocate, encourager...and his own presence.

I don't know if Jesus comes to you off the pages of the gospels, or in a dream or a meditation or a prayer...I don't know if Jesus comes to you through the glory of creation, or the sweetness of a tiny baby...

I do know that Jesus is one with God and comes and comes and comes to us, always inviting, always open, encouraging us to know God, and love God.

Perhaps you will meet Jesus, and love God, through a lifetime of work in mercy giving and justice making.

Perhaps through laboring for the healing of creation.

Perhaps through a heart broken open by longing, by praying, by seeking.

Perhaps even through this pandemic, which strips away so many of our preoccupations, so many of our self-absorbed distractions, and shows us our deepest longings for connection and communion, even as it also shows us humanity's deep dark impulses of selfishness and destruction.

I just don't know. But I do know this...Jesus invites, Jesus speaks, Jesus welcomes us into the love of God...over and over.

And if that isn't the toughest kind of love, then I don't know what is!

It is strong enough to challenge our selfishness, our delusions, our ego talk.

It is strong enough to call us out when we are wrong,

and strong enough to go with us when we are lost in the dark of suffering and confusion.

The love of God, known in Jesus, is strong, tough, resilient love.

In your life, I invite you to accept it, lean into it in need, and know it is big enough and strong enough to hold you.

Now and always.

Halleluiah.

Amen.