

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Sunday May 10, 2026
Text: John 14: 15-21
Preacher: Christopher McLaren
Theme: A life-giving dance

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for his departure. He does not want them to feel alone and abandoned. He is telling them something incredibly important that cannot be seen with normal sight. He is telling them that though he is leaving, he will send another companion who will be "with them" in a way that is ongoing and intimate. Jesus wants them to stay connected to him as that is the key to living like Jesus lives. Their ability to love one another is grounded in their love of Jesus, who pours God's love into them. It is a powerful conversation and the mystical heart of what it means to be a faithful Christian, staying connected to Christ.

It is also a touching moment. None of us want to be left behind. None of us want to say goodbye to someone essential in our life. Jesus is saying goodbye to his friends but at the same time he is saying something like "I'm going to leave you but you will not be alone."

It is a difficult and comforting thought, though Jesus will no longer be physically present to them, he will be present to them in and through the Spirit in the depth of their own being. I hear people say things all the time that remind me that the Spirit is alive and active in our lives. The sudden urge to call someone that turns out to be a critical and much needed

contact. The niggling reminder to show up somewhere only to discover what you most needed was to be found there. The quiet urging to do the right thing even when it would be much easier not to.

Years ago, I guess it was in the 90s. there was a popular phrase “What Would Jesus Do? It issued forth in all manner of Christian kitsch. WWJD was emblazoned on jewelry, Tshirts, hats, bible covers, and bumper stickers. It was supposed to be a daily reminder to be Christlike, to engage daily situations by asking how Jesus would handle it. I’ll be honest I really didn’t like the movement much as it seemed a bit too presumptuous that people actually knew what Jesus would do. The problem with this kind of “Just add water” mode of discernment is that we are not Jesus. If we see a hungry crowd, we can feed one or two people. But we can’t miraculously make a bakery out of a baguette or a seafood restaurant out of a piece of salmon. If we encounter a person with a serious illness we are unlikely to be able to heal them of their disease. I’m not saying that it is a terrible question just a tough one to answer sometimes. Of course, I’ve had some wicked fun with the question, asking it in the most shocking of ways, “Who would Jesus bomb?” or “Who would Jesus deny healthcare to? Or “Who would Jesus separate from their children by deporting them?

However, in preparation for this sermon I came across a idea from a preacher Onuma Okoro. She thought that a better phrase might be found right in this gospel IYLM, “If You Love Me.” IYLM is perhaps not as catchy as WWJD and doesn’t roll of the tongue, but it could make us stop and ask what’s really

at stake with our next move in whatever situation we find ourselves.

In this week's text the phrase "If you love me," is completed by the phrase "you will keep my commandments." However, "If you love me . . ." is a powerful and open-ended phrase that invites us to think deeply about how our own faith-lives meet a world that doesn't always recognize God. How do we keep God's commandments when we are faced with people and policies that promote injustice and inequality? Is our duty to all people, regardless of whether they value the tenets of kingdom living or honor the ways of God? "If you love me . . ." invites us to draw on the Advocate whom Christ has given us for strength, instruction, and power. It is the Spirit of truth who continuously reveals to us God and God's ways

There is a quality to John 14:15–21 that seems like a kind of command or demand that Jesus is making. However, I don't believe that Jesus is wagging his finger at his disciples and saying that declarations of love had best be backed up by action. "If you really love me, then you will do as I do." I think that Jesus is drawing out the implications of an intimate relationship with him. This is not only a call to duty and obedience, to keep our end of the relationship we want to benefit from. It is something much more intimate and tender I think. It is saying that if you love Jesus and stay connected to him, then that connection will give you the inspiration and energy to live like Jesus lives. The ability to love one another is grounded in our ability to love Jesus, "If you love me."

Faithful Christian action is rooted in our ability to love Jesus and stay in communion with him.

This story is very emotional in that it features that most familiar statement and implied question, which most of us have been at the receiving end of at one time or another: “If you love me . . .” I bet that you can imagine all sorts of ways that sentence might end. It could be pure manipulation, someone just trying to get you to do what they want you to. I’m sure no one has ever tried that relational jujitsu on you. But how would it sound if it were coming from someone you cherish, someone you want to please at all costs, even if perhaps you haven’t fully counted the costs.

But there is something different about this gospel relationship as it is not one between equals. To be honest, we cannot do what Jesus does: ask the Father to give us another Advocate, the Spirit of truth. It is not in our power, without Jesus, acting as our intermediary, asking God to give of God’s self to be with us forever. Nor can we love with the urgent, almost recklessly self-sacrificial love that Christ shows us—not without the power of that Spirit of truth.

Each one of us comes to the Bible with our own story, our own personal understanding of love, and our complicated life experiences. We know that these shape how we read the scriptures and how we imagine God. Some of us find scripture to be a faithful friend and read in these verses a

powerful but pleading Jesus who just really wants us to do what's best for us—that is, to be his people in the world and life into that high calling that others may know God's love. Some of us have trust issues with the Bible and don't like to be told what to do. I hope that somehow in these words we can hear a gracious and merciful God who is not one to force us to do things but who rather woos and invites us into a depth of love that we hunger for. To be sure, Jesus desires obedience and mutual love, from those who would follow him, but he offers himself freely through invitation, opening us to the possibility of following him into the life of the Spirit.

If you love me, all I'm asking is that you keep my commandments. Oh, I know that my commandments can be difficult but they lead to life and they lead others to life and I'm sending you my Spirit to help you.

All I'm asking is that above all else you try to love one another, if for no other reason than because you love me. And I love you, and I am in the Father and you are in me, so I am in you.

At the center of it all, Jesus is asking us that intimate and challenging question: "If you love me?"

If you love me, try to find a way to welcome people into your life that you do not understand and do not talk or think like you, just like Jesus did over and over again.

If you love me, then find a way to show love and hospitality to those who are made in my image but call me by another name.

If you love me, then speak out when you see people mistreated for being made in another variation of my image. But do it in a way that honors me, not in a way that honors the world.

If you love me, advocate for the dignity of every human being for no human being is illegal in God's beloved eyes.

If you love me, then name the false gods you worship as false, the ones made of gold and silver, the good life at the expense of others and put them behind you with the power of the Advocate I give to you.

If you love me, love others as I have loved you: with a kind of love that expects and hopes to be loved in return but that still, despite the conditions, will love anyway.

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. John 14:20

Christian theologians have characterized the inner life of the Trinity which Jesus is describing in this passage as with a fancy Greek word "perichoresis." Perichoresis is a dance, a life-giving movement that goes round and round without beginning or end. This is the love and the life of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Jesus the Son, did something surprising. He showed us that this Trinitarian dance is not just for divine persons only. God invites humans into this dance as well. This is the love that Jesus reveals to his disciples and to us. The dance is going on right now, right

below the surface of our everyday eyes. Music is playing just beyond the range of our hearing. And as we listen to Jesus consoling his disciples, telling them that they are not alone, that the Spirit is coming to them, our own lives begin to open up, our own consciousness expands ever so slightly and our feet begin to tap on the vibrant earth alive with the Spirit.

If you love me, join the dance.

I am deeply indebted to Onuma Okoro for her key idea that is used throughout this sermon of "If you love me," IYLM, being a stronger way to measure our lives with Christ than WWJD. I am grateful for the commentary of John Shea on this passage that helped to shape the section on the Trinity and the dance.