



May 17, 2020 • The 6th Sunday of Easter
John 14:15-21
The Rev. Anthony Estes

My mother's name was Carolyn. Carolyn and my father, Anthony, got married after I was born and they were pregnant with my sister Karelyn. Two more sisters would follow.

My parents both worked hard to raise us and expose us to culture and education. They wanted us to have full childhoods and show us a world outside of our two-family flat on the outskirts of the University of Detroit's University District. Mama taught us the value of hard work and consistency. She prayed over us every morning. She taught us the importance of practicing what we preach.

She and my father were active in the local parent association and cooking for bake sales and fish fries to raise money for our Pentecostal church. It wasn't a perfectly charmed life for our family of five, but by and large, I'd say we were happy.

When my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and when she eventually died from it, my life changed. In a sense it changed because my mother was no longer alive to me. But my faith in Jesus Christ would not also let me admit that she was truly dead.

She was alive and is alive in Christ. And although I do not see her physically, I hear her voice, I remember her smile. I can see her in my facial features and in my hands. I see her grit and wit in my three sisters. I see her fierce love for her children and her family in my father.

I often imagine what she would think of what my life has become, because she hasn't been around to tell me otherwise. And for that I am grateful, because I have the sense that she and my fiancée Brittany would be conspiring in the most hilarious ways.

Jesus — knowing that he would die, knowing that God the Father had given all things to him, knowing that one of his closest companions would betray him — decided he would spend one of his last nights on earth with his friends, eating, relaxing, probably cracking some jokes.

And then, after dinner, Jesus does something unusual. He is the leader of the group, but he does a task that a servant would do. He washes the feet of his friends. It was on this night that Jesus begins to say goodbye to his friends.

And he tells them, in part: *"If you really love me, you will keep my commandments."*

Now his friends would understand the importance of commandments because they were Jewish. And to hear Jesus say this meant that he was making a profound theological statement: That loving Jesus and obeying Jesus are connected at the most fundamental level.

Loving Jesus means washing the feet of others. It means working for the calls of the hurting and the helpless. And it means doing those things as a way to show love and obedience to Jesus.

Christ Church Detroit
960 East Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, MI 48207
313-259-6688 | www.christcd.org

Jesus Christ, for Christians, is not merely a great teacher. Jesus is Lord of our lives and has authority over our actions. And we obey Christ not out of fear of judgment but because we love him. We are in relationship with him. We delight in the things that delight him and he delights in us.

Our obedience, our subordination to Christ, delights God our Father and we do it, we obey, we submit because of our love and reverence for God...in the same way perhaps when we are children and we subordinate our own wills in deference to our parents. (And of course that's an ideal that all of us, either as children or parents, can only really imagine.)

Perceiving the commandments of Jesus Christ, wrestling with them, seeking to understand them is yet another way we show love to and for Jesus Christ. Being critical, not of our actions but of our motives, can ensure that our loving obedience to Jesus Christ is not disconnected from our hearts and certainly not the practice of making ourselves righteous for the sake of just having something to brag out.

This kind of attention to details requires the gift that Jesus left for his followers. He called it the Spirit of Truth. If you read today's gospel in different translations, you may see that this spirit is referred to as Comforter, Counselor, Advocate and Companion, to name a few.

There is an extended conversation by scholars in how to interpret this, but I think though it is sufficient to say that Jesus, on this last night with his friends, was letting them know that though he was going away, they would not be abandoned. Though he was physically going away, his spirit would be the way that Jesus' comforting, consoling, advocating presence would continue among them.

They would not be orphaned. They would not really be without their teacher. Because if they loved and obeyed Jesus, the spirit, his spirit, was guaranteed to be among them and in them.

The world was a scary place without Jesus. And so it is for his followers today. That's why we must remember that Jesus Christ is alive. We may not physically see him, but he's alive. And sometimes we can see that clearly at work in us as individuals and among us as a congregation and community of faith.

Sometimes it is hard to see him. And this is where the evaluation of our motives and obedience is key to clear things up, so we can catch glimpses of Jesus.

And this ability to perceive Jesus is especially important because Jesus told his first followers that the world at large would not have this gift. It would not be able to perceive his presence in the world.

And so today it does not take long to figure out that the world is so caught up in being obedient only to itself that it doesn't seem to be open to Jesus' spirit.

Now, that doesn't make the world bad. Just like in John's gospel, it doesn't appear to make Judas bad for betraying Jesus. It doesn't seem to make Peter bad for denying Jesus. What it does mean is that the world — we — can take actions in the name of autonomy or self-preservation that disregard Jesus' command to live with and in love.

And it makes it hard to see him. What the world needs, now perhaps more than ever, is a glimpse of Jesus.

And what we can gather from today's passages is that glimpse will be facilitated by the presence of Jesus' spirit in us. Whether we could walk for a mile or not, whether we work on the front line as essential workers or not, the hero the world doesn't know that it needs is Jesus Christ. And we are the

witnesses that the risen Lord Jesus comforts the comfortless and discomforts those who are too comfortable. He advocates for the vulnerable just as we advocate for the vulnerable.

For those of you who are suffering in silence, feeling abandoned, you are not alone. Jesus is alive. Jesus is alive in you. Jesus is alive in Christ Church Detroit.

As we love him and obey him and try to figure out what that means, his presence becomes more physical. If you can, plug in more if you want to see more of Jesus. Join us for Bible Study and Game Night and art, all virtually.

And for those who live with others and perhaps need a break, need some kind of retreat, I think Jesus knows the value of alone time with God, as well. "*As you love and obey,*" Christ Jesus promised to his first followers in the gospel from today that Jesus would make himself known to them, be visible to them.

Perhaps you might figure out a way to take a retreat, even if it is in your own home, so that you might be able to see Jesus more clearly, not only for yourself but in others. You are not alone. If you love Jesus, if you obey him, you will see him.

I still hear my mother's voice. And every now and then, she comes to me in a dream and comforts me or confronts me. I awake knowing I am loved. I awake knowing I will see her again and that, until then, I will try my best to live a life that follows her example of loving Jesus, loving family and friends, and serving others.