

This last Thursday evening we had Confirmation Examination. Some young men and women sat up front here in the “hot seats” and were ruthlessly grilled by yours-truly for a good 20 minutes. The nerves and tension were palpable.

They performed splendidly.

But! Little did they know that the test would continue today...

The examination is still going, in fact, this morning I’m going to put all of you through a Confirmation examination. Who’s ready?

It’s a pass or fail test. One question. Get it right and you are fit to call yourselves members or friends of St. Paul’s. More importantly, get it right and you deserve to call yourselves disciples of Jesus.

Are you ready? Here’s your question...

Do you love Jesus?

Show of hands this morning, how many of you would say you love Jesus?

(I’m really hoping all of you raise your hands... if you don’t please report to my office after the service today ☺)

Do you love Jesus?

The answer seems simple, doesn’t it?

Of course we love Jesus! Examination passed, we are good to go!

But is it really that simple of a question... I don’t think it is.

You see, it is entirely possible, and quite easy, to claim that you love someone or something, but not actually love that person or thing.

Allow an example... It would be quite easy for me to say the words, “I love the Green Bay Packers,” but having grown in Michigan it would be a pretty bold-faced lie. I can say the words, I could raise my hand if asked, “Who loves the Green Bay Packers,” but that doesn’t mean I actually love the team.

Now, I’m not saying that’s what happened this morning. I’m not accusing any of you lying to my face when I asked you if you loved Jesus just a bit ago. But, I also know there is another way our claim to love Jesus this morning could be proved false.

It would be quite easy for me to say the words, “I love taking care of my body. I love working out. I love eating healthy foods.” it’s easy enough to say those words, but if you would spend a few months following me around, measuring the waistline, checking the number on the scale, keeping a log of the time I spent working out, and the food I put into my body, you could probably make a pretty compelling case that I don’t actually love my body or working out or eating healthy.

It’s one thing to say you love something, but is another thing entirely to prove it. Just saying that you love something isn’t enough, you have to actually be willing and ready to follow through on that claim and do the work of loving – putting your money where your mouth is; proving your words by your subsequent actions that your love is genuine.

So, let me ask it again, do you love Jesus?

Let’s take a look at Jesus’ words for us today and see if we’ve answered that seemingly simple question correctly.

Do we love Jesus, or not?

Jesus lays out a pretty simple test to determine whether or not our love is genuine, whether we’re just blowing smoke, or if we actually putting our money where our mouth is.

“If you love me, keep my commands.”

If you love me, keep my commands...

Let’s let God’s word make Jesus’ test abundantly clear. How much “keeping of commands” is necessary to pass the test... If I keep Jesus’ commands 51% of the time is that good enough? How about 90%?

“Cursed is everyone who does not *continue* to do *everything* written in the Book of the Law.”

Continually doing *everything*... that is the standard, that is the test.

“If you love me, keep my commands. All of them. All the time.”

That’s the standard. That’s the test.

So, let me ask it again, let’s do a show of hands again: Do you love Jesus? (I’m expecting not as many hands this time...)

According to Jesus and his standards for how we ought to prove that love, it kind of looks like the answer is “no,” right?

And that’s kind of a depressing thought, isn’t it?...

But that’s what God’s Law does.... That was one of the questions from the actual Confirmation Examination last Thursday: What is the primary function of God’s Law? It shows us our sins. It acts as this big, uncomfortable, full-length mirror, where when we take an honest look into it, we see reflected back at us every stain and wrinkle and blemish – everything that is ugly and not quite right about us. It makes a pretty compelling case that none of us actually love Jesus – not the way we should; not the way he expects.

And that *is* a depressing realization – coming to terms with just how little you and I deserve to be members of Christ’s church, to understand how miserably we have and continue to fail God’s examination, this simple test of loving Jesus by obeying his commands.

But step one to recovery is admitting you have a problem, right? And that is the exactly why God has given us the Law – to force us to admit that we have a problem.

But another incredibly important truth that we reviewed last Thursday, another incredibly important truth of John 14 is that there are two teachings in the Bible. God not only gave us the Law, he also gave us the Gospel (an old English word for “good news”). The Bible is a bad news and good news kind of book. The Law shows us our sin. The Gospel shows us our Savior.

John 14 is Jesus talking to his disciples. Do you know where they are? Do you know where this fits in the timeline of Jesus’ life?

Jesus is sitting with his disciples around a table, in an upper room, on Maundy Thursday evening – just hours before his death on the cross. In that attention-grabbing

act of selflessness, he's washed his disciple's feet. He's revealed to his disciples that one of them was going to betray him (after which Judas left to do his dirty deed). He's had that uncomfortable conversation with Peter where he accurately predicts that before the next morning came Peter would disown him three times.

Jesus was sitting at a table surrounded by men who were and would do a pretty terrible job of loving Jesus by keeping his commands.

The good news, the Gospel is that even though we are not very good at loving Jesus, that doesn't stop him from being really good at loving us.

He's proven that love in all that happened in the hours following this little sermon in John 14. His cross, his death with our sins on his innocent shoulders means we are forgiven – forgiven for every time our love for Jesus has been lack-luster and lazy. He loved on his cross so that there could be a different and better way to have a loving relationship with God.

The Bible says there are two ways to love Jesus that are acceptable – two ways to love Jesus that mean a healthy relationship with him and all the blessings that a healthy relationship with Jesus entails (like peace, hope, and heaven).

Either you continue to do everything written in the law. Or you live by faith in the Gospel – trusting that Jesus loved enough to compensate for your failure to love.

Jesus has proven his love and the rest of this section from John 14 gives us a beautiful promise to continue that crazy love for disciples who aren't very good at loving back.

It is easy to get muddled on what Jesus says in the rest of this section, but when you take the time it is a pretty impressive promise. John 14:16-21 promises us that every member of our Triune God is interested, invested, and active in loving you.

Jesus promises, **“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth... you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”**

God the Holy Spirit loves you – and not with the lack-luster love you show him, but with a perfect and eternal love. He loves you so much that he has set up his permanent residence in your heart. And notice how he gets there. It's not by you inviting him, it's not by you earning his love and presence. At the request of Jesus, he is a gift from the Father. A gift who comes to you to live with you to be your advocate and help. An advocate is someone who speaks up on your behalf – the Holy Spirit takes it upon himself to remind the Father that you are a child of God through faith in Jesus as your Savior. An advocate and a help – actively working in your heart to strengthen the faith he gave you and help you grow in your life of love.

God the Holy Spirit loves you. And he always will, Jesus promises it.

Next Jesus promises, **“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”**

God the Son loves you – and not with the lack-luster love you show him, but with a perfect and eternal love.

In a matter of hours Jesus was going to leave his disciples for a time in death. This coming Thursday we are going to celebrate ascension – that day when the resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven and left us, his disciples, behind. But just because we cannot physically see him does not mean he is gone. He has not abandoned us. He has not left us alone without the love and protection of a family, like little kids in an orphanage. He promises that he too, with the Holy Spirit, has taken up residence in your heart. And he has another promise. Besides his promise to live in you now, he has that promise for the future, that beautiful Easter-proven promise that because he lives, so will we, with him, forever in heaven.

God the Son loves you. And he always will, he promises it.

Finally Jesus promises, **“The one who loves me will be loved by my Father.”**

God the Father loves you. – and not with the lack-luster love we so often show him, but with a perfect and eternal love.

Yeah, our love for Jesus is far from the perfect love he deserves and expects, but our relationship with Jesus and the Father does not depend on our ability to love. We are children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. He is our Father because of Jesus' love. What's left? Well, how do you thank a Triune God who loves you so thoroughly, so perfectly, so passionately?

You love him back. We love because he first loved us – not perfectly, not till we get to heaven – but we try, not because we have to, but because we want to, because the all-powerful Triune God has made his home with us, because God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit love us.

So, do we love Jesus? Yeah, we can say that we do – by that faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit, who was sent by the Father at the Son's request, we love the God who loved us enough to die for us. Grow in that love. Show that love by keeping his commands.

Amen.