

*What Have We Learned?*

Shepherd's Grace Church

May 5, 2013

<sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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.

<sup>25</sup>"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>But the Advocate, 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. <sup>27</sup>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.

<sup>28</sup>You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup>And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. (John 14: 23-29) (also read Acts 16: 9-16 Rev. 21: 10, 22-2: 5)

"I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger, traveling through this world of woe; but there's no sickness, toil or danger in that bright world to which I go! I'm going there to see my father; I'm going there no more to roam. I'm only going over Jordan. I'm only going over home!

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! We are moving quickly now! We are moving quickly away from Easter, from resurrection, from the promise of eternal life. We are quickly moving back into our busy work-a-day worlds where the promise of resurrection is overshadowed by the seemingly endless mountain of life that gets in our way! Today we look back in order to look forward. Today we ask, what have we learned?

We are 5 weeks past Easter and the excitement of that day. We are moving toward Pentecost and we are still not sure what all that means! We know we will wear red and we know we will see flames and fire and smoky mist. We know we will hear different sounds and see different sights, but what does it mean? What have we learned?

We have learned that Jesus is going away! In the first verse of John chapter 14 we hear him say "In my Father's house there are many mansions. I am going there to prepare a place for you." We have learned that we know the way to Him. In verse 6 he tells us He is the way, the truth, the life and no one comes to the father except through Him. These things we have learned but how does this happen?

We gather this morning to honor knowledge, to honor those who have achieved certain levels of knowledge and who now move on their quest to know even more. Perhaps what we need to know can be gained from examining what they have come to learn. As a graduating senior, Kayla Crane has come to know that she doesn't know much about history, doesn't know much biology, doesn't know much trigonometry, doesn't know what a slide rule is for but she does know one and one makes two what a wonderful world that could be! At least that is what the song says.

One and one makes two. Josie, Kitra, Blake and Kenton haven't learned quite that much yet but they do know A,B,C. It's as simple as a,b,c, one , two, three, baby you and me! That's how simple love can be! A, B, C, One, two, Three that's how simple love can be. What have they learned?

See, you thought we were celebrating the promotions of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and the graduation of seniors because of all they learned in school for these last many years. You thought we were recognizing some incredible wisdom these young men and women had come to possess. If you think for a minute back to your time in school you will realize this is not what we are celebrating at all. Kayla, Kitra, Kenton, Josie and Blake have not finished their learning. They have barely begun! They have, however uncovered some extraordinary facts.

They have discovered that school teaches information but that information must be applied to life. They have begun to assimilate the ABC's and the One and One's in such a way as to get along in the world. Significant In their learning is the next phrase in the song. That's how simple love can be! Love...simple as the a,b,c's and the one, two, three's but then there is that statement at the end; the "Baby you and me's" What do we do with that? What have we learned about that? How shall we apply that?

Today we celebrate our scholars, our achievers, our future, because you see these who are before us today are our future! They are the ones who will carry on our tradition! They are the ones who will become "you and me!" They are our legacy to the world and we, you and me, we must ask ourselves what kind of legacy we leave to the world. Do we just leave the ones who know the stuff, the abc's and the one,two,three's or do we leave those who are willing to think about the stuff, to listen to the stuff and say there is more in that stuff, that is some heavy stuff?

That is where our scripture lessons meet us this morning! If we read them carefully and pay attention to the abc's we recognize that our scholars, our graduates must get something more from what we have taught them than just the basics. They must be prepared for the world and the ways of the world that pushes them around and beats them up and invites them to get up and ask for more. They must become like the Apostle Paul has become, a perpetual student who takes the abc's and the 1,2,3's and asks questions around them in order to allow us to become the "you and me's"

Just before Paul crosses over to Macedonia in this week's passage he is rebuffed in his efforts to go elsewhere. Paul has learned about the gospel of Jesus Christ. He has learned his abc's of the faith but what he must still learn is how and where to apply his new found knowledge. The Lord does not intend for Paul to go just anywhere in his efforts to spread the gospel; the Lord intends Paul to go to the place where his message can be most authentic and most productive.

Before today's lesson in Acts 16: 9-15, Paul is blocked first by the Spirit of God and then by the Spirit of Jesus before he finally learns his true path. To those who are being promoted today, to those who are graduating today, I offer this part of the scripture as a reminder to you. Before you decide that you know everything and can head in whatever direction you choose remember the passage from the Book of Jeremiah where God says, "I have a plan for you and it is a plan to prosper you and not to harm you." Remember that your life is yours but it is a yours as a gift from God! As you prepare to share it, listen to God so that you might share it in the most authentic way!

This lesson is one that is valid for all of us as we sit today, enthusiastic about those who have accomplished so much. We also have accomplished much, but are we giving back from that which we have accomplished in the most productive ways we can? Are we praying daily and vigorously for God's direction in our lives or do we find our lives, our plans, our dreams being continuously blocked by God because they are not the most authentic way God desires us to live our lives?

In his book, "Let Your Life Speak," Parker Palmer suggests that God will let us go where we want, but often times, where we want is not where God wants. As a result, we often find ourselves unproductive and frustrated. If you find yourself in a dead end existence, frustrated by a lack of meaningful, motivated activity perhaps it is because God is blocking your path and wants you to listen to Him for more clear direction. The abc's of following God are not just for the newly promoted! They are for all of us this morning and they invite us into something more complete than anything we could ever imagine!

When Paul finally stops thinking he "Knows it all" and starts listening to the Lord look how easy his path becomes. When he finally says to God, "Baby You and Me" he finds clarity in his direction and his work, his life, his very existence take on a purpose that is productive and bears great fruit. Paul sees the fruit right in front of him and moves toward it because he knows it is given by God! Paul's authentic ministry was not to others but to the people God put in front of him.

We often think we have a ministry beyond the world we are born to. We want to make a difference in a broader sense and we think we just can't do enough in the place we are put. Those of you who are being promoted today, those who are graduating believe you have the whole world at your feet and your whole life before you. Let me tell you this morning that you do, but the world you have is the one you live in. God calls you to serve here! God calls you to serve now! What have you learned? It's easy as abc. It's simple as "you and me." God calls you! God calls each one of us to be citizens of the place

where God has placed us and to be in relationship with those who are around us! I believe this is exactly where the message of the Gospel meets us this morning!

“Those who love me will keep my word,” Jesus says. In school we learn the basics of speech and grammar, math and algebra, history etcetera. All we learn is the basics. What school intends to do is not provide us with everything we need to know to get along and be successful but provide us with the basics so we can learn to think and reason for ourselves. These words Jesus speaks this morning are the basics.

Those who are graduating this morning, those being promoted this morning, all of us gathered here this morning must take this fundamental principle and learn how to apply it. What have we learned? We have learned that to love Jesus is to keep His word! You graduates who are being honored here this morning should notice something very special in the statement. Jesus does not say keep my words. He says, “Keep my Word!” He speaks of a singular word. He speaks of only one word! If we love him we are to obey only one word. What word? Of all the words Jesus spoke, which one word are we to keep? How can we know? How can we eliminate all the other words and focus on only one? What have we learned? Think about that for awhile while we move on. We will come back to it. Perhaps it will be more obvious in a bit.

Now let’s look at the next claim He makes. “Those who do not love me will not keep my words.” Here Jesus uses the plural, “Words.” Is this a mistake on his part, simply a slip of the tongue or is there a reason he uses the plural. I do not think Jesus mis-speaks. I think He intentionally uses the plural. What he is trying to tell us is that if we do not love Jesus we will not be able to obey or keep any of His words. In this statement those who are observant, those who have learned how to think begin to understand the first statement. If you do not love Jesus, you will not be able to keep his words!

I said last week that being a Christian was not easy! It is hard work and it can only be accomplished one way. Earlier in the chapter Jesus says “I am the Way!” The only way we can be true to our calling is through Jesus and the only way we can live through Jesus is to Love Him! If we do not love him, we cannot serve our neighbors well. We can serve them for awhile, we can do a few good deeds but gradually and eventually our motivation will cease and we will burn out. We will grow tired of selfless service and we will not be able to accomplish the tasks God intends. Those who do not love Him will not be able to accomplish His works and will not be able to remember all he has spoken to them. They will not keep his words because they have no true motivation to do so! They will not be able to remember because they have no reminder!

In that same passage where Jesus said “I Am the Way” He also said, “I Am the Truth.” The truth is that Jesus life is authentic. In Him there is no deceit or dishonesty. He comes into the world with one purpose, to accomplish the will the One who sent him. According to John 6: 37 forward that will is the

redemption of the world. Jesus' purpose is to pay the debt of the world so that the entire world might once again be restored to God! He knows this purpose very early in His ministry according to John. He knows it as early as chapter 3 where He tells Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life!" This is the truth! This is the authentic purpose to which Jesus was sent and the ministry that He is called to.

Those who do not love him will look at some of the world and recognize its worth. They will seek after the rich and powerful and hope they can minister to them but Jesus came for the "least of these." Jesus came for those who do not have others or resources to care for them. The truth is that those who have enough in this world must be compelled by something other than their desire for more wealth in order to find their authentic purpose. God does not care how much we make in this world. He does not care about the resources we accumulate. God cares about what we do with those resources. Hebrews 9: 27 promises us that there will be life and then there will be the judgment. All of us will face it and if we have not kept his "Word" our judgment will not be what we hope. What have we learned? Do we know the word yet?

The final part of that passage where Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth" is "I Am the Life." Those who do not keep Jesus words fail to do so because they want to substitute other words. The world is a very deceptive place. Just as the serpent tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, the world does not tell bold lies. The world says well, you can do just a little. It wont hurt to cheat just a little. No one will know. No one will care. Everyone else is doing it!

Jesus is the life. His example is the way and the truth about how we are to live. He came to demonstrate a different way of life, a way that will bring abundance (John 10:10) and that abundance comes to us each and every day! Jesus came to encourage us to live where we are and be of service where we are and honor God where we are by keeping his word. What is His word? What have we learned?

If those who do not love Him do not keep his words, then by extension the word we are called to keep is "Love." Those who love Jesus keep his word by their actions! If He cares enough to love those who are regarded as "less than" by others then it is easy to imagine that He loves even us. Because He loves us, He cares and shares life with us and that from that life comes the abundance which supplies our every need. We learn then that from His love we are not only caused to love but we are compelled to love. If Jesus, the Word which became flesh and walked among us (John 1: 14) loves us enough to offer His life as redemption for ours, how much more should we love others who need our presence in their lives?

In chapter 13, after Jesus washes the disciple's feet he asks them to learn a lesson from His actions. If he, the teacher and the master has washed their feet, ought they not was one another's feet? The disciples learn this lesson and they keep his word teaching and preaching according to His direction.

That's what happens to Paul in his encounter with Lydia today. His understanding of God's great love in the Word of Jesus moves Lydia to faith in Jesus and moves Jesus' ministry forward through Paul and through her willing generosity! What have we learned? We have learned that "Love" is the word and those who keep that word in their lives keep Jesus in their lives! Those who love are loved by the Father and then notice what happens. God doesn't send them on some grand journey to the ends of the earth to find Him. God, who is very near to each of us, loves them and comes with Jesus to live with them where they are!

Too often we look for our ministry in other places. What Jesus wants us to know this morning is that our ministry is right in front of us and it is not a ministry we do alone. We do not have to search for God's work in far off countries. We do not have to alter our location. What we have to do is learn that our ministry is not of our own making, it is of God's making and it takes place where we are. What have we learned? We have learned that through the love of Jesus, God is with us! God is Emmanuel! By God's presence we are able to accomplish His plans and allow His kingdom to move closer! We do not need to look for God's work, we need only keep God's word and He will guide us.

In fact, Jesus tells us exactly how that will happen this morning! While He is with the disciples He teaches but after He has departed the Holy Spirit, God's advocate, will come and will teach us everything! Apparently these 8<sup>th</sup> grade promotees and High School graduates and the rest of us have not learned everything! And apparently neither have we. There is still more to learn. So what have we learned?

We have learned that the word we are to keep is love. If we keep this word God, who is near to us, will come to us with Jesus and take up his place with us. He will do this through the Power of His Holy Spirit who will complete our education. Because we Love Jesus we rejoice that He is returning to His Father. We recognize in His absence that the Holy Spirit can be present to complete our education! The Holy Spirit will continue to remind us to live as we have been taught; to love others even as Jesus has loved us and to allow God's ministry to be accomplished through us in the place we are.

We have learned that God is more than a far off concept that exists only to judge our every move and criticize or every mistake! We have learned that God is, instead, a God who wants a close personal relationship with us, a God who invites us into service where we are, a God who loves us so much that He gives everything, even His only Son so that we might live. In short, we have learned that God is Love and Love is what we Keep! It really is simple as "ABC, Baby you and Me! Amen!