

Turning the Corner

Shepherd's Grace Church

May 25, 2014

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This 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 in you.

¹⁸"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They 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." (John 14: 15-22) (Also Read Acts 17: 22-31)

Context: This is Memorial Day weekend. We celebrate today the memories of those who served our country in times of peace and war. We celebrate the memories of those who paid as Abraham Lincoln said, "The Last Full Measure of Devotion," so that our nation might be held up as a nation of righteousness and freedom given as gifts by God alone and dedicated to the proposition that "All People are created equal!" This is also a weekend in which we will say goodbye to Pharsii and Hannibal, our two foreign exchange students. The year has gone quickly for me and it seems as if the time passed was but the blink of an eye! We look forward to hearing great things that are going to happen in their lives but for today we concentrate on the memories we have of our time together.

You probably have not considered as I have that during this time of Easter, the time after the resurrection of Jesus, we consider scripture from the Book of Acts and from John. There may not be much significance in that when the text is just taken in small doses as we present it on Sunday morning. If we look at it in the larger sense of the two books however, it may be considered in a different light. Luke's *Acts of the Apostles* takes place entirely after the resurrection and invites consideration of the ministry of the Church after the departure of Jesus. John's gospel invites consideration of Jesus' preparation of His disciples for the practice of ministry. As we watch these two messages unfold, we can and should begin to imagine God has more in store for us than resurrection.

Think about John's gospel for just a minute. No where in that message is there a hint at the difficulty God will have raising people from the dead. In chapter 11, Jesus prays after a dead man and the man

emerges from the tomb. Impossible for humans, but for God nothing is impossible. If therefore, we are to live in an age where nothing is impossible, we should prepare ourselves to do the impossible, to know the impossible, to embrace the impossible! By doing this, we should realize that while resurrection changes everything, it is not the only thing God is preparing us for as we spend time with Jesus and the other disciples! God is preparing us for *Turning the Corner*! God is calling us to know there is more to life than death and resurrection! God wants us to round the corner and see that there is Life to Life!

As we listened to Paul's observations of Athens and the evidences of worship around the city, Paul was inviting the audience to whom he was preaching to *Turn the Corner*, to look beyond that which was directly in front of them, and see the reality of the world from a bigger perspective! He observed that others who had lived among them had done this. He said their poets had seen more in the world than was visible to them. Paul said that as he walked through Athens he found a shrine to an "Unknown God." He invited them to consider *Turning the Corner* to see that which was previously unknown to them.

Paul asked them to know the invisible through the visible. He invited them to look down the street, to take note of all that is made and to recognize that the Unknown God they had unknowingly memorialized was responsible for all they saw! Paul wanted them to know that even though they could not see God, God was present, God was involved, God was busy building a relationship with all of creation and making evidence of that creation the intersection at which humans, even unbelieving ones could recognize him, seek Him out and strive to be in a relationship with him!

This God Paul speaks of created all the gold, the silver, the jewels of the world and to worship them diminishes Him! Paul wants this people who believe in worship to worship that worthy of believing in. Paul wants them to know that to this one who is the creator of all, they owe their lives; in this one they live and move and have their being. He is unknown but not invisible! He is unseen but not out of sight! This God Paul is revealing is right around the corner, just down the street from where they have been looking and This God desires to make Himself known to them...and to you...and to me!

Turning the Corner invites the Athenians and us to seek God not where we might want to look for God, but to seek God where God may be found...off the main street...outside of the ornate statuary...in our hearts and in our minds and in our lives where God has always been and where God always desires to be! God's desire to be with us, Paul says, goes beyond the silver and gold we worship as incredible treasure. God's desire to be with us is evidenced in God's willingness to show us what is around the corner; to show us the possibilities we might come to know. The question God asks this morning is, "Are

we willing to *Turn the Corner,*” and look? Are we willing to push beyond what the world believes and wants to seek after what God wants?

To answer the question we must remember that while resurrection changes everything, it is not the only thing. God’s power to raise someone from the dead has been clearly established. What does God want from us after our acceptance of eternal life? What is God’s will for us? That is the question? What is God doing to accomplish God’s will! That, I believe is exactly where the Gospel of John meets the people of Athens...meets us this morning.

Jesus says, If you love me you will keep my commandments. This is an abrupt change in the conversation Jesus continues with his disciples. You know the conversation. It is Thursday night. Jesus is to be crucified on Friday and He knows it! His purpose in the conversation, a 4 chapter conversation is to prepare the disciples not only for what is about to happen but for what will happen after that. In the verse just prior to where our lesson begins today, however, Jesus is talking about faith. Those who believe in me...those who have faith in me will do my work and even greater work and the Father and I will come to them. Faith is the issue of the conversation and then everything changes!

John Wesley helps us recognize that before there can be love, there must be faith, “the evidence of things hoped for, the promise of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11: 1) Wesley’s point...Jesus’ point really is that before we can fall in love with Him, we must first believe in him! Last week he gave us two ways to believe. First, because the father was in him and he in the father and second because of the works that have been accomplished through the Father in Him! What Jesus is saying in the abrupt transition is, “Faith is our choice. Love is our response!”

It is impossible to love someone without first believing in that person. Jesus knows that. For that reason, He invites his disciples to trust him, to look at his actions, to examine them and to decide for themselves if they can follow him. Most can. Most look at the evidence of His work and determine that He is who He says He is. Most but not all. Judas could not believe. Because he could not believe, he could not love. The rest, even those who lacked courage in the moment stayed, sat, and listened to the teaching Jesus had for them. His message of death and departure was a difficult one to hear but they stayed because they believed.

Do you remember the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*? Of course most of you do. The music was incredible. Many of the songs brought back incredible memories. *Sunrise, Sunset...Tradition...*the fiddler himself, walking along side Teve’. The song I want you to recall this morning however is *Do You Love Me*. You

remember that the song is a duet. It is sung by Teve' and Golda and asks the question: "Do You Love Me?" Teve' wants to know if Golda is in love with him. He has been with her for 25 years and he is unsure.

Golda's answer illustrates the process Jesus is clarifying this morning. Teve' says, Do you love me? Golda responds, "After 25 years I wash your socks, cook your food, clean your house. After 25 years, why talk about love right now." The point of course is that for 25 years, Golda has trusted Teve' to provide for her, to care for her, to protect her and her family. She has learned that he is worthy of all she has. She does not need to say she loves him. She has demonstrated her love because she trusts him. She stands alongside him and they work together because they have a mutual respect born out of trust!

Teve' however, wants to redefine the relationship. Trust is fine. Trust and faith can fuel a perfectly acceptable relationship but they are simply not sufficient to sustain a relationship that will last a lifetime! There must be a bond that is unbreakable. There must be a covenant that reminds both parties that they belong to one another, that they are in one another, that they will be there for one another even when they do not understand the motive or method of the other!

Love is the more powerful link that holds relationships together even when faith cannot. "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends!" (1Cor. 13) For Teve'...for Jesus there is a need to establish a bond that can never be broken! There is a need to define, determine and demand an unyielding loyalty that comes in spite of any outside interference! Love is that link! Love is the natural extension of faith that comes from trust.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments, Jesus says. Again remember that we are together with Jesus and the disciples on the Thursday before good Friday! The only commandment Jesus has given is that we "Love one another, even as I have loved you." This must be the commandment Jesus is talking about. In chapter 14, Jesus is talking about the lesson he taught in chapter 13. He is inviting this vulnerable group of very confused friends to remember the lessons He has taught, the works they have witnessed and to recognize in the works the wholeness of His relationship with them!

At the end of the song, Golda and Teve' both affirm that after 25 years, their pronouncement of love for one another doesn't change a thing. They have trusted and believed in one another and that should be enough. Jesus, I believe, would respectfully disagree. Faith, because of the works is enough to gain understanding of who the person is. The disciples knew who Messiah was/is. They witnessed the works

and they could easily imagine him as the son of God, the Father's only begotten filled with grace and truth! (John 1) Faith, however would not move them to bear witness!

Faith is the evidence of things hoped for, the promise of things not seen, however faith will not sustain us in difficult times. Faith will remind us of facts but it will not sustain relationships. Faith is evidence of things past! Love lets us look to the future! Only love sustains. Love allows us to lean on one another when times are difficult. Love lets us know that no matter what, the other one has our back! Love reminds us that we are not alone! Love exists only in relationships.

Faith invites us into relationships. That is what Jesus is doing when he says, if you cannot believe in me, believe in the works themselves. He is inviting a closer look at what he does and who he is. He is asking that we carefully consider him as a person worthy of falling in love with. He is inviting us to make a choice! Love is that choice. It comes from recognizing that we desire something deeper than a simple knowledge of who a person is or what a person does. It invites instead a response that allows for the other to reach out to us at difficult times, to do for us when we cannot do for ourselves. When Teve' and Golda say it doesn't change a thing, I think it is because it is something they have been living in for the past 25 years. Faith is evidence of an act. Love is action beyond the evidence.

Teve' and Golda exhibit that action in the cooking, the cleaning, the darning of socks and in the provision for family even without saying it. They walk side by side with each other during the good years and the lean. They protect and care for one another in sickness and in health. They defend one another's freedoms and liberties because they know that the other would do it for them if they could. They live into the rest of the words Paul speaks when he says "Love never fails!"

Love, true love is the willingness we have to give to one another when we have nothing left to give. Love is the last full measure of devotion that one will offer to another even at the cost of one's own life. In the next chapter, Jesus says this. **"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15: 13)** As we come to Memorial Day we recognize that those who signed up to serve did not do so for glory or personal honor. They served and continue to serve because they believe we, all of us, deserve the liberties and freedoms given by God which include life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They are willing to lay down even their lives for us to defend these liberties because they believe that without these liberties we have no life.

They have been taught through the years that, **"A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."** (John 13: 34) They believed and

continue to believe that we all have a higher authority to answer to, that authority is relationship...relationship to one another and to God! Inside of relationship, they have come to understand that inside relationships there are responsibilities, not only to the other, but to the relationship itself. Love for one another is not borne out in outward expressions but by inward reflection upon how we will act, how we will respond when the other is threatened, even if the other is unable or unwilling to respond in kind!

Jesus taught this kind of response when he said, I will go to the Father (something we are unable to do) and will ask him (something before Jesus that we were unwilling to do) and the Father will send another advocate, one who will remain with you forever! In this revealing of Jesus' intention, he demonstrates his love for us by giving us not one advocate but two! The "Spirit of Truth" or the "Spirit of Jesus who has made himself known as truth" is the advocate who teaches us how to avoid sin in our lives and Truth Itself as the second advocate when we slip up and sin anyway! The commandment to love one another as I have loved you is lived out in Jesus' willingness to die in order to go to the Father for us! In this act, Jesus demonstrates His last full Measure of devotion!

That same devotion, that same love, learned and lived is the essence of all we remember on this Memorial Day weekend. Those who served, all of them and those who serve today recognize that it is our love for one another that makes possible our willingness to lay down our life for a friend! They recognize that Love transcends this life. They recognize that while resurrection changes everything, it is not the only thing and they *Turn the Corner* willingly demonstrating their love all!

In Jesus teachings they, even as we, can learn that we are not being prepared only for God's exhibit of power. We are being prepared for something more! Faith lets us believe in God's power. Love reminds us of God's desire to be in a relationship! For God so loved the world that He gave His only son that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life!" (John 3: 16) Because God is eternal, God desires that relationship to be eternal also! God wants us to know as Jesus invites us into relationship that that relationship will never end. Paul tells us that in 1Corinthians 13. "Love never ends," he says. Faith and hope remain with it but Love is the greatest.

Love is greatest because love gives life! Love creates and sustains life even in the midst of death! Love transcends this world and the next because Love is the relationship God invites us into. It never ends because God never ends.

Love has a beginning. For Teve' and Golda, it begins as they begin their life together. As they learn to trust and believe in one another they fall in love. For little children, love begins as they learn that they can trust their parents, their brothers and sisters and family members . over time, they fall in love with those around them and they begin to be responsible to them. They begin to be filled with a "Spirit of truth" and their life begins as they begin to enjoy life with those around them. Love grows and relationships grow and it expands as new relationships begin. Love for a few becomes love for the one and for the many! Love's beginning has a predictable path and that path is life. Life, eternal life begins as the spirit infects the heart and allows us to care for one another even to the point of death in this world!

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." (1Thess. 4: 13) Those who are prepared know that death in this world is not the end. They know what Paul goes on to say in 1st Thessalonians. Just as God has raised Jesus from the dead, so to he will raise us and we will spend eternity with the Lord in the air! Life begins as we experience love and we can recognize God's power in resurrection by faith but we can only recognize eternal life in love, the love we have for God and for one another!

620,000 people recognized this as they gave their lives in the civil war. This war is the place where our Memorial Day comes from. Nearly half of all the casualties coming from combat during the war history of the United States came from this war. This war caused brother to fight against brother but eventually it allowed for the freedom of all people. This war made possible the recognition that all people are created equal. Prior to this conflict, black men were only counted as 3/5 of a person. Women were not counted at all. Those who gave their last full measure of devotion paved the way for the words of our *Constitution and Declaration of Independence to be lived into fully!*

130,000 more died in WW I. Another 430,000 died in WW.II. 37,000 perished in Korean and 58,000 in Viet Nam. Sometimes the mission was clear, sometimes less so but in every case, those who believed in the liberties we hold so dear stepped forward to share their love with one another even as Jesus had shared his love for each of us. There is not greater love than this and it was and is given freely by those who know they are free! They live and they die because they know they will live again and they know the commands given by Jesus!

The "Unknown God" Paul points out this morning is our God...is their God and while he may be unknown by some, He makes himself available to all so all who are willing may seek Him and Him they may live

and move and have their being knowing that they are and always will be in a relationship with Him. They have felt his spirit move in them and they have responded to his gentle nudging to reach out and take his hand and be held now and for all time! Because they love him...because we love him, we can respond with confidence to Jesus command that we love one another regardless of color of skin or gender or sexual persuasion or economic and social status. We can love one another because the Spirit of Truth lives in us and helps us know that while resurrection changes everything it is not the only thing! There is life! There is life!

Today we are *Turning the Corner* and as we do, we see that God has more in store for us than we could ever imagine. Life is in store for us because Love is begun in us! This weekend, let us remember those who have loved us and have given their last full measure of devotion for us. In their memory, let us love one another! Amen!