

A Present Reality

John 14:15-21 (May 17, 2020)

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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.”

Historical Context

This passage continues from and is part of Jesus' final speech to his followers before his arrest, trial, torture, and brutal execution. For their part, the disciples are grieving and anxious about the thought of being separated from Jesus. The whole section from 13:36-14:31 is concerned with the departure of Jesus and the response of the disciples. In light of this and other factors it has commonly been referred to as a "farewell discourse."

Theme: A Present Reality

“I will not leave you orphaned.” That is the promise. How strange that must have sounded to the disciples. In the same conversation Jesus tells them that he is leaving and coming. Leaving and coming sure sound like opposites.

Leaving and coming. Presence and Absence. These must be held in tension, not as mutually exclusive. That tension confronts us with the question of whether Jesus, for us, is a past memory or a present reality, a sentimental story that makes us feel good or a living experience that challenges, guides, and nurtures our life.

According to Jesus the answer to that question is determined by love that is revealed and fulfilled in keeping his commandments. The commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves, to love our enemies, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Do we keep the commandments? Is our love growing, expanding, transformative of ourselves and the world? If so Jesus is probably for us a present reality and we know the fulfillment of his promise that we are not left orphaned. If, however, we are not loving so much. If we remain self-enclosed and isolated we relegate ourselves and each other to the orphanages of this world. Jesus' promise is still real and he remains faithful, we simply have not claimed it for ourselves.

Keeping the commandments is our access to Jesus' promise that we will not be left orphaned. Keeping the commandments does not make Jesus present to us. It makes us present to the already ongoing reality of Jesus' presence. The commandments do not earn us Jesus' love they reveal our love for him, a love that originates in his abiding love and presence within us.