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 John 14:15-31
 Forty-fourth Message
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INVITATION INTO TRIUNE LOVE

When a couple gets married, the parties don't just enter into a relationship with another person, they also enter into the circle of another family's relationships, one that is held together by bonds of love. Some families welcome this with open arms, while others make it painfully difficult to get inside their circle of trust.

When we become followers of Jesus, a wedding takes place and we are invited into a family. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God in three Persons. We are welcomed into this family with open arms and are granted access to the circle of trust. Cultivating and maintaining this circle of love is crucial to our spiritual life.

In the fifteenth chapter of the gospel of John, Jesus has some important words to say to his disciples concerning love and obedience. John includes this material from the upper room so that people might understand what it means to become a follower of Jesus. Our text has two sections, each of which has three basic themes. The two sections mirror one another with the repetition of these three themes – obedience based on relationship and love, the promise of the Holy Spirit, and the departure and coming of Jesus. The first section is the shorter of the two, while the second section expands on the themes of the first, with some additions and variations.

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“Love” is the key word in our study (mentioned 10 times). The notion of love is a repeated theme in Jesus' farewell discourse. We remember this from his new commandment to the disciples to “love one another.” But this love is different. It is the love of the Triune God for us and our love for Jesus. As believers in Jesus Christ we are invited into Triune love, to become part of an intimate circle. Complete understanding of this mystery is elusive, but hopefully it motivates us for deeper reflection and prayer.

For the sake of simplicity, I will combine the verses dealing with each theme. The first theme we see is obedience based on relationship and love.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. (John 14:15 NASB)

“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?” Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My

word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. (14:21-24)

The concepts of love and obedience are frequently joined together by John. We find this three times in the upper room discourse and also in 1 John (14:1; 14:21-24; 15:14; 1 John 5:3). Obedience is described as keeping the commandments/commands of Jesus and the word/words of Jesus. The words of Jesus are not his own, they are the words of the Father. The commandments and words speak to the entirety of God's revelation, including the specific command that Jesus had just given to the disciples to love one another.

The idea of obedience tied to love implies an intimate relationship. The believer does not initiate this relationship of love or gain Jesus' love by demonstrating obedience. The idea is that an ongoing love relationship between Jesus and the believer is characterized by obedience. The result of this love relationship is keeping Jesus' words. Love travels in both directions. The disciples love and obey Jesus and he loves them in exactly the same way that he loves and obeys his Father, and the Father loves him. The whole idea is that the oneness between Jesus and the believer is like the oneness between Jesus and the Father.

Jesus told the disciples that when he left they would do what he did, and even greater things, by praying in his name, praying in accord with everything that the name of Jesus means. The result of obeying out of love means that we bring our life into accord with the name of Jesus. Like focusing a camera lens, we superimpose our life onto the life of Jesus through our obedience.

Every parent goes through the process of going away and leaving the kids in charge. This strikes fear into the heart of every parent and ecstasy into the heart of every teenager. The parent wants the children to do what the parent would do if he or she were present. When there is a relationship based on love, there is an expectation that instructions are not necessarily a burden and will be obeyed. Children who are maturing and growing actually want that responsibility. They hate it when their parents call every hour to check up on them. Jesus is departing soon, and here he is charging his disciples to carry on his work.

Jesus tells his disciples that he will disclose himself to the ones who love him, and this prompts a question from Judas (probably Judas of James, mentioned in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13). Jesus had just told his disciples, in 15:19, “After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me.”

Judas is taken back. How would Jesus make himself known or visible to them and not the world? Why the distinction? If Jesus is the Messiah, why won't the world see him in all his splendor? The Jews expected that the world would see the kingdom of God when

it came (Acts 1:6). There was an expectation that God would show himself like he did to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Jesus answers the question by telling Judas that his expectations for the kingdom of God were all wrong. Something dramatic is going to happen, but it will be much better than what happened to Moses. In this love/obedience relationship the Father and the Son will come and abide in the believer. The word here for “abode” is the same word as “room” in verse 2. Jesus is leaving to prepare a room for the disciples. Now the Father and Son will make a room in the believer. This is the only place where Father and Son are linked together in this task. One would guess that this takes place through the Spirit. (Augustine believed that the triune God indwells the believer.)

Jesus would show himself to the disciples after the resurrection. But more significantly, he would reveal himself by taking up residence inside them. The world does not see or experience this, only followers of Jesus. We experience the presence of Jesus, and through love and obedience we see the greater things that Jesus continues to do through us – creating, healing, saving and blessing.

Love and obedience and God dwelling among his people describe our relationship with God. “To speak of love apart from obedience would open the way to a purely emotional and sentimental interpretation of the ‘abiding’ ... To speak of obedience apart from love would open the way to the slave-mentality against which we shall be warned in chapter 15 (15:15; Rom 8:15) ... Obedience is the test of love; love is the content of obedience.”¹

The way God’s people related to God in the OT was also characterized by love and obedience. They were to love him with all their heart and keep his word. God dwelt among his people, but not within them. The obedience was external, and the people of God could not sustain their commitment. Mere duty will not generate obedience to Christ; only love for him can do that. But now in the new order, through love, obedience comes from a changed heart, from within.

We might ask ourselves a couple of questions. First, are we living in obedience to the word of God? Are we keeping his commands? This is always a tough issue. We want Jesus to save us but we want to run our own lives. Our problem is that we attach eternal significance to the temporary things of the world. This leads to idolatry and disobedience. If we are honest, all of us fall short. But honesty is the place to start.

But the deeper question is, Do we love Jesus? This is what Jesus will ask Peter after the resurrection. In his book “Blue Like Jazz,” Donald Miller describes someone asking Bill Bright what Jesus meant to him. He couldn’t speak. His eyes just welled up with tears and he started crying. Would we react in the same way?

A true love relationship with Jesus isn’t easy. We are selfish, clinging, demanding and possessive. Love for Jesus is like the love we have in marriage. We share the same room, we are together all day and all night, for better or for worse. While both relationships start with infatuation and feelings, this will not sustain the relationship. Love must be cultivated or otherwise it will die.

“‘Love is the work of love,’ Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard said. Love is work, a matter of will, not emotion. [This is why Jesus could command love. ‘No one but a fool would try and command an emotion.’ (Peter Kreeft)] To love is to wish good for another and to will it. The choices we make naturally for ourselves we must learn

to make for others, for their happiness, comfort, protection, and security.”²

I don’t feel like serving/loving my wife at times. When I am tired, I don’t want to go to the store or help around the house. I must make a choice out of love. If I don’t engage my will out of love, then I play the victim and grow resentful. In the same way, loving Jesus is a choice. The amazing thing is that when we make the decision to love, God enables us and often the feelings follow.

We love Jesus by reflecting on his love for us, by knowing him as the way, by making him the object of our eternal hopes and dreams, by allowing our loneliness to become the sacred place where we experience his indwelling presence.

The second theme we see in our text is the promise of the Holy Spirit.

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. (14:16-17)

“These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (14:25-26)

Jesus had told the disciples that they would do greater things, and whatever they asked in his name would be accomplished. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God’s enablement and God’s abiding presence in the midst of his people.

The age of the Messiah, the age to come, the new covenant promised in the OT is inaugurated by the death of Jesus. The Spirit was promised in passages like Ezekiel 36:26-27 and Jeremiah 31:31-34. Of the four gospel writers, John has the most direct teaching on the Spirit. It is mentioned five times in the upper room (14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-11, 12-15). There are also five other antecedent comments (1:32-34; 3:5, 34; 4:23-24; 7:37-39). This all anticipates chapter 20, when Jesus tells the disciples to “receive the Holy Spirit” (20:22-23).

John’s label for the Spirit is Paraclete. This word, adopted from Greek language, was used in rabbinic writings primarily for legal assistant, advocate, someone who helps another in court, like a defense attorney. The word can imply an intercessor (1 John 2:1) or an encourager. It can mean a comforter, but not comfort like a quilt gives. Or it can mean helper, but one who is not subordinate or inferior. Paraclete is a word used to describe Jesus in 1 John (2:1), and thus here we see the phrase “another Paraclete.”

The Spirit is given by the Father at the Son’s request and sent by the Father in Christ’s name. Jesus came in the Father’s name (5:43, 10:25); the Spirit comes in Jesus’ name. While Jesus will depart, the Spirit will remain with the disciples forever. This is a change from the OT. The Spirit is the presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent. The Spirit is to the Son what the Son is to the Father.

The Spirit is described as the Spirit of truth (15:26; 16:13). Since Jesus is the truth (14:6), the Spirit bears witness to the truth of Jesus and communicates this truth. It is the Spirit who fulfills Jeremiah 31: “‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, say-

ing, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.’” (Jer 31:33-34 NAS95S)

Jesus tells the disciples that the Spirit will teach them all things and will remind them of all that Jesus said. The disciples didn’t get it when Jesus was with them, not because they were wicked or stupid but because they were human. Part of this might be particular to the apostles as they came to a full understanding of the OT and laid the foundation for the early church.

The world cannot see or know the Spirit because the world is the moral order in rebellion against God. The Spirit confronts the world with the truth (15:18-26; 16:7-11). The world is suspicious of what it cannot see and what cannot be explained. You can’t know the Spirit without the presence of the Spirit.

The Spirit allows us to read the Scriptures and have our minds and hearts illuminated by the truth as it is in Jesus. I read the Bible before I became a Christian but I had no understanding of it. I could hear a sermon but nothing would penetrate. But when the Spirit came inside of me there was a drastic change. I began to read the Bible and I could understand what it meant. I remember having the Word burn within me, speaking directly to me when I heard it spoken and explained.

This is why we are committed to expository teaching here at PBCC. The Spirit of God takes the truth of God deep into our hearts. At times when I’m in conversation with someone the Spirit will effortlessly bring Scripture to mind that bears directly on the conversation. The Spirit of truth is so essential because every day the world throws out hundreds of lies to deceive us. It is the Spirit that guides us on the straight path through the dangers of the world, the flesh and the devil.

We are Spirit people. Sometimes I wonder just how much we are aware of and depend on the work of the Spirit. Historically, the Western church has been more mind-oriented, while the Eastern church has been more open to mystery. The Western church focuses on the crucifixion while the Eastern church focuses on the resurrection and the life of the Spirit, having much more of a Trinitarian approach towards God. In fact, Calvin was greatly influenced by the Eastern church fathers. We don’t have to be afraid of the Spirit since the Spirit bears witness to the truth of Jesus.

Not only does the Son give his Spirit, he also gives peace. This is a variation now between the two sections of text.

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. (14:27)

Peace reflects the idea of the Hebrew word *shalom* – the customary greeting and word of farewell. This word of farewell becomes a word of greeting on three occasions after the resurrection (20:19, 21, 26).

Peace is one of the fundamental characteristics of the messianic kingdom anticipated in the Old Testament (Num 6:26; Psa 29:11; Isa 9:6-7; 52:7; 54:13; 57:19; Ezk 37:26; Hag 2:9), and fulfilled in the New (Acts 10:36; Rom 1:7; 5:1; 14:17).

Leslie Newbigin says that *shalom* “is the essential substance of the promised blessing which is the goal of the whole human journey.”³

The peace that Jesus gives calms troubled hearts and dissolves fear. The word “trouble” is the same word as we find in 14:1 – “do not let your heart be troubled.” What kind of peace does Jesus give? Jesus gives “my peace,” not “my space.” In chapter 15 we will see

that he also gives “my love” (15:9-10) and “my joy” (15:11). These are the first three fruits of the Spirit. Jesus’ peace is transcendent. He is the bridge over troubled waters. The world cannot give this kind of peace. World peace is only a temporary cessation of strife, a cease-fire at the end of a period of fighting. Even religion can’t give peace (Jer 6:13-15). Notice in our text that the world cannot see Jesus, cannot receive the Spirit and cannot give true peace.

The Romans brought about *Pax Romana* (Roman peace) by the sword. Some “Jews thought that the messianic peace would have to be secured by a still mightier sword. Instead it was secured by an innocent man who suffered and died at the hands of the Romans, of the Jews, and of all of us.”⁴ Jesus knew that the disciples would face tough times in the days ahead. They would be persecuted, thrown into jail, beaten and killed. Their hearts would become troubled and fearful. Jesus comforts them with this promise. And he comforts us as well. Life is a battle for all of us, even if we are not thrown into jail for our faith. Hurricane winds can arise at any time, bringing great storms into our life. Waves of trouble and grief may sweep over us, and “sorrow like sea billows roll.” The cure for an anxious heart is the peace of Jesus.

Our natural tendency is to look to resolution, closure, order, recovery, vacations, sleep, movies, drugs, and hundreds of other things to settle our agitated hearts and bring peace. But the world cannot give the Jesus peace, only he can. This is an amazing promise – that even in the midst of the battle, with no resolution, no end in sight, no happy ending, being taken advantage of and treated unjustly, we can experience *shalom*, the peace of the Messianic kingdom, the peace that “surpasses all comprehension” (Phil 4:7). This is why Paul can say, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (Col. 3:15).

The final theme concerns the departure and coming of Jesus.

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. (14:18-20)

“You heard that I said to you, ‘I go away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here.” (14:28-31)

Jesus is leaving, and the disciples will grow fearful and despondent. Jesus tells them that they will not be orphans. An orphan is a child bereft of parents, with no support. Rather, after the resurrection, Jesus will come. The disciples will see him and they will live. Two of the resurrection appearances are projected in terms of Jesus’ coming (20:19, 26). The phrase “in that day” is a common OT phrase for the “day of the Lord” (Isa 2:11; Jer 31:29; Matt 24:36). The resurrection will usher in the messianic age. Jesus will live and the disciples will also have resurrection life. He is giving advance warning so the when the disciples see him again, they will believe fully.

The second section repeats the first but adds additional thoughts. First, there is a rebuke. The disciples fail to understand and rejoice with Jesus concerning his leaving. If they loved him they would be glad. His leaving ensures that he will take them to be with him forever. The disciples also should rejoice because the Father is greater than Jesus. Arians, the followers of the ancient Greek Christian theo-

logian Arius, took this to mean that Jesus is less than God. Gnostics took it to mean that Jesus is not fully human. But the phrase means that Jesus would be returning to the sphere where he belongs, to the glory he had with the Father before the world began. The Father is greater than the Son in his incarnate state. The disciples might have realized that Jesus was going home and been joyful for him, but they are concerned only for themselves.

Newbigin says that “the joy of the true disciple is not in his own salvation but in the victorious joy of Jesus.”⁵ This is often the failure of the church. We are more concerned about our own grief and sorrow than the things that bring joy to our Master. Do we rejoice because Jesus has gone to be with the Father, or are we lamenting because we wish he was still here with us?

Second, the devil is coming, but he has nothing on Jesus. Jesus is not of the world. He was without sin. The devil could have a hold on Jesus if there was a justifiable charge, but there was none. In the end, the devil’s wisdom is self-deceived and his power is powerless. Jesus loves the Father and does as the Father commanded (8:29; 15:10). Jesus’ obedience is for the world to see and learn. He was not defeated by his death. The devil did not win. The world will learn this either by discovering the truth or when every knee shall bow.

“Rise, let us go,” marks the end of the first discourse. These are the same words that will be spoken in the garden to the sleepy disciples. Jesus goes out to meet the foe. The action is his. These words sound similar to the words that emanated from Flight 93: “Let’s roll!” The “parting is not cotton wool for the timid but steel for the courageous.”⁶

In the same way we arise to love Jesus and do what he has commanded. The world will know our love for God through our obedience.

As we have seen, our text is quite Trinitarian: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God calls us into this family circle, into triune love. We are not orphans, but sons and daughters. We live in the same room, the same body. The relationship is close, intimate and abiding. We learn to love in same way that we have been loved. We learn to walk in obedience and faithfulness from our heart like Jesus did. The Spirit of truth guides and illuminates our path. The peace of Jesus calms our fears. Do these truths bring us joy and comfort as Jesus intended? Do we love Jesus more than our own life? If we do, the devil will have nothing on us.

Perhaps, like me, you are overwhelmed with your inability to love Jesus. As we close this service we will sing “My Jesus I Love Thee.” Let us sing this hymn as an affirmation, prayer, desire and commitment to love our Savior and Lord.

¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 186-187.

² David H. Roper, *Song of a Longing Heart* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers), 101.

³ *The Light Has Come*, 192.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 506.

⁵ *The Light Has Come*, 193.

⁶ *The Light Has Come*, 193-194.