

Mr. Eddy inspired excellence. He was the band teacher at my highschool as I began my time there, and for more than a decade he had been there, teaching students the beauty of music and their ability to produce a high calibre performance. He had high expectations but he wasn't harsh, per se. No, rather than beating you into a great band, he led by example. He demonstrated the joy that came out of music and he taught you that each person there was perfectly able to bring something wonderful to the table.

So when you didn't meet his standards, either in your behaviour or in the group's performance, he didn't get mad at you. It was so much worse. He got disappointed.

Rather than raising his voice he would get sullen. He treated us like adults, showing us that he knew we should have known better, better than to chat when the adjudicator was speaking, better than to waste time when we should be practising, better than to mess around on stage and both look and sound like fools. What could have been a glorious moment of music was thrown away, and we'd joke that it would be better if he got mad instead.

It works from a teacher, and it works from parents too. "I'm not mad; I'm just disappointed" is the classic line, and honestly the punishment is so much more painful than if we were just shouted at by mom instead. Happy mothers' day, by the way.

It seems as though Jesus is taking this approach in our reading today. "I'm not going to berate you into listening to me. I'm not going to make you stand in the corner until you act as my people. If you loved me, you'd listen to my commands. If you don't do my commands, well, I guess it's pretty clear that you just don't love me."

Last week, just a few verses earlier in our chapter from John, we heard a similar message. "If you believe in me you'll do the same works I do—even better, actually! Oh. Nothing grandiose is happening? You must not really believe in me."

If the fruit of good works, of commandment following, isn't popping out of your life as you go through your days, what's happening? What do you really believe? Whom do you really love?

And we imagine Jesus just walking quietly beside us, seemingly hurt by what we've done, or more often than not, failed to do.

And the situation doesn't get much better in the rest of the passage. It seems like if we don't love Jesus and follow His commands, He won't also send us His Spirit, the Comforter, to be with us even in His absence. It seems like He won't return to us, nor will the Father be present with us. If we don't love Him by keeping His commandments, He might just not love us.

A straight reading of this text, neglecting the greater context of John, and you're left scrambling for Jesus' affection and presence or you might as well just throw in the towel.

But no where in John has Jesus gone and listed the 10 commandments, warning that an imperfect attempt at keeping them will be noted in the heavens and remembered. The new command that has been given, and is returned to repeatedly in these chapters is nothing more and nothing less than to love your neighbour.

This is Jesus, towel tied around His waist, washing their feet.

His command is to sacrifice your own pleasure and pride for the care of those around you. So the ethic we are called to is not divorced from the 10 commandments certainly, but it gives all of God's Law a very specific reason. God is not interested so much in whether we can jump through His hoops, but He has given us His Law so that we would know how to care for those around us in spite of our own sin, our blinders of selfishness. Don't gossip. Don't commit adultery. Don't murder. Honour your parents (again, happy mother's day). All for the sake of being drawn out of your life, your self-interest, and reminded that you've got a world of people around you that you will hurt if you're not careful.

But John, in his first epistle, reminds us that this is not the first command that Jesus gives.

²³ And this is his commandment, ^athat we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, ^ajust as he has commanded us.

To love our neighbour comes second; it flows from the first commandment that John preaches anew to his hearers. And he doesn't write this for the first time, but is just recalling Jesus' own words that he himself recorded in the 6th chapter of his Gospel account:

“This is the work of God, ^athat you believe in him whom ^rhe has sent.

The One whom has laid before His disciples the task of loving His neighbours, if we are going to take Him at His Word and believe that His advice is sound, well, it wouldn't make sense to say “His ethics are good but the rest of Him is unreliable. I'll take Him at His morals, but I don't think I'll choose to keep His own actions or His full message.” No, we are to believe Jesus, hook, line, and sinker. His command to love one another is perfect, but we are to love one another as He has loved us, as He has loved His disciples, which we can see portrayed through the rest of the Gospel.

Yes, Jesus attached obeying His commands with receiving His love, with being united with each person of the Trinity, but He says all this knowing full well that within days they will have abandoned Him in fear. They won't be steadfast in their love nor their belief and yet Jesus doesn't turn around from the cross and withhold His love for them. No, He carries on, dying even for their sin and then fulfilling His promises regardless of their faithfulness or faithlessness.

He does not leave them as orphans on the day that He dies but He rises. And He returns to them who ran from Him—and He doesn't sit there quietly waiting for them to own up to their weaknesses or prove that they've changed. No, He fulfills one promise after another for them without much of their deserving, as He reconciles Himself to them, forgiving them with His pronouncement of peace, and He proceeds to give this Comforter, Advocate, this Holy Spirit who is promised to those who love Him and fulfill His commands.

The One who commands us to follow His commands, and promises that such goodness will sprout forth from them, He is the One who loved you neighbours unconditionally, before you could deserve it, before you knew you needed it. He doesn't come like a disappointed band teacher or parent, guilt tripping us, shaming us into doing better next time, not just because He knows it won't work on us due to our sin, but also because He loves us perfectly.

Jesus makes these promises, that of His Spirit, that of His presence, that of our lives with Him today and forevermore, the promise of His love, not on the condition of our love, but assuming that those who hear of Him, those who know Him, will simply love Him. That is, those who hear of His great sacrifice on their behalf, those who hear all that He promises not just there in eternity but here in time, they will believe Him and rejoice in all He is and does, they will be drawn to meditate on Him, to hear more of Him and thus be renewed in Him. They will spend time praying to Him, that is chatting with Him whom they have learned to believe in, and thus in all His foot-washing, sin forgiving, others-serving love will not simply inspire them to change and believe in Him and love Him, and thus follow His commands, but His love will change us in spite of our best and worst intentions.

Christ is very serious about how we live as Christians. He expects love to flow out of us. He expects mothers to serve and nurture and support just as He expects fathers to sacrifice and provide and to give. He expects friends to be present, listening, walking together in the good times and the bad. He expects His people to demonstrate His compassion and to refrain from bringing suffering and sorrow in whatever vocations they find themselves in. He expects His Church to show forth His love.

But He also knows that this only happens by His love. So He unites Himself to us, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit going with us through each moment that it would not be left up to us and our sin. He promises this to us, that we would rejoice and love Him all the more for what Christ has done and for what our God is doing, and thus He sanctifies His people and shows His love all the more.