

Easter 6 5/6/18
John 15:9-17 B

THESE THINGS I COMMAND YOU, SO THAT YOU WILL LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

In order to throw the ball, you must first catch the ball. It's as simple as that. You cannot play baseball or play catch unless you first catch the ball. So it is that we catch the love of God and we give that love away to our neighbor. That's what Jesus says. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (v. 12). Like the headlights of our car guide us, showing where to drive, warning us where not to drive, the Commandments guide us, teaching us what a holy, God-pleasing life is, and what it is not. This morning, in light of Jesus' words in our Gospel, we are going to focus on the Commandments of the 2nd Table of the Law, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself".

In our Epistle, the Apostle John, the same man who wrote the words of our Gospel, says, "And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 Jn 5:3). Really? It's that easy?

Maybe, honestly, we should say, No, it's really not. Loving your neighbor – that is not always an easy thing to do. Despite your resolve, you find yourself not loving your neighbor as yourself; loving your bank account, your toys, your time, even your job, more than your neighbor. You try to love your neighbor as yourself, but you still find yourself disrespecting authority. Come on, aren't speed limits just more suggestions than law, anyway? You find yourself bored, unsatisfied with the wife God has given you, so you find yourself lusting after that other woman. You find yourself speaking gossip, lies, and rumor. You desire and covet what you have no right to possess.

In our flesh, the Commandments are burdensome; they are a pain in the neck; a hindrance to the way we want to live our life. God gives you love, but you take your ball and go home. It's just easier. We hear the Word of God, pray, sing the hymns, partake of Holy Communion, but practice no love for our neighbor.

Loving our neighbor is a very easy thing to do and the Commandments, even those of the 2nd Table, are not a burden when you consider who you are -- not in and of yourself, according to your natural birth, but who and what you are in Christ Jesus. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God" (1 Jn 5:1). That would be you. You believe that Jesus is the Christ. You confessed that the day of your confirmation and re-affirmed it again this morning in the Creed. And that means you are born of God.

You believe that Jesus is true God and true man. You believe that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. You believe that He lived a life of perfect obedience to God's Commandments for you – He always loved the Lord God with all His heart, with all His soul and with all His mind, and He always loved His neighbor as Himself. He suffered under Pontius Pilate and died, crucified upon the cross for you and buried. He redeemed you, a lost and condemned sinner, from sin, death, and the devil. You can be sure and certain of that because the 3rd day, He rose again from the dead. Forty days after that, He ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. To use His words in our Gospel, HE LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR YOU!

That's what you believe. You believe that because you believe Jesus is the Christ and that's what it means to believe Jesus is the Christ. You believe that because you were born again of God, born anew by the water

and the Word of God, when you were joined to Jesus, died with Him, and rose to new life in Him. In that water and Word, He gave you that redemption from sin, death, and the power of the devil that He won for you with “with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death (2nd Article),” and He gave you faith to believe that He is the Christ. You are born of God. And for one who has been born of God, His Commandments are not burdensome.

Good works are what you have been created in Christ Jesus to do. Paul puts it this way in the book of Ephesians, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:10). Jesus says it this way in our lesson, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit” (John 15:6).

Our *Small Catechism* teaches us this,

163. *What are good works in God’s sight?*

In God’s sight a good work is everything that a child of God does, speaks, or thinks in faith according to the Ten Commandments, for the glory of God, and for the benefit of his or her neighbor.
(*Luther’s Small Catechism*, 154).

It’s as simple as playing catch [GLOVE]: God pours out His love on us in Jesus Christ and we “throw” that love to our neighbor. God pours out on you all His good gifts in Christ Jesus. In Christ, we “catch” His forgiveness, life, and salvation; love, patience, gentleness, goodness, kindness.

And that means that you have those good gifts of God to give your neighbor. God doesn’t need those fruits from you; God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does. So, you catch the FORGIVENESS God gives you and “throw” it to your neighbor who has sinned against you. You

catch the LOVE God gives you and give it to someone who has hurt you, harmed you, sinned against you. You catch PATIENCE and GENTLENESS God gives you and you “throw” it to your child, or that co-worker that just rubs you the wrong way. You “catch” the GOODNESS and KINDNESS God throws to you, and you “throw” give them to your neighbor who needs a ride, who needs moldy sheet rock torn from their home, who is mourning the death of a loved one, who is just having a bad day.

You are born of God, so you do the things of God. You do what you have been created in Christ Jesus to do. You really do keep the Commandments of God with a joyful and willful spirit. It flows from you because Christ lives in you and you live in Christ.

You have been baptized, but your Old Adam swims so very well. Loving your neighbor as yourself – raises a ruckus. God’s Commandments are burdensome. No one is to have authority over you; you want to keep a record of wrongs and not be reconciled; you like gossip; you are greedy and covet.

The Christian life is the life of repentance and repentance, our Large Catechism reminds us, is nothing more than a return to the waters of our baptism, to hold the head of the Old Adam under the water of our baptism, so that he drowns and dies and we put to death all sins and evil lusts and desires within us. And who comes forth? The new creation you are in Christ, to live in righteousness, innocence, and blessedness this day, and always.

“Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth,” John writes in his 1st Epistle (3:18). By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments. For this

is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.