

# **God's Sandwich**

**John 14:15-21**

The 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Parallel Texts: None

Companion Texts: Acts 17:22-31, Psalm 66, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:15-22

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:2)

Our Gospel Lesson today follows immediately upon the words of Jesus spoken in last week's Gospel. As you recall, the setting is the Upper Room, where the Disciples and Jesus are eating the preparation meal for the Jewish Passover. Jesus has just said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." He has driven home the point: only through Him can one reach Heaven.

And then the Disciples are given this "Love Sandwich."

Sounds kind of funny, doesn't it. But after all, what is a sandwich? It is two pieces of bread with something good in between. The bread is the substance that holds things together. Without it, the mayonnaise would trickle down your arm and splat on the table. The bread is something to hold on to. It gives the sandwich form and substance...something to grab.

Between these two hand-holds we place the good stuff: peanut butter, jelly, ham, pickles, cheese, roast beef, lettuce, tomatoes, bologna, turkey, and everything else we can find. That is the stuff that makes the sandwich worth eating! That is the prize!

While trying to be careful to **not** carry the analogy of this lunch-box special too far, let us look at the "sandwich" that Jesus gave His Disciples:

He starts and ends with a good, solid foundation...a real solid hand-hold...something with real form and substance: "If you love Me, you will obey what I command" ...and He ends with, "Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me."

Now THAT really lays it on the line! There is no room for doubt in these words! Jesus is speaking to believers in that Upper Room, and He expects their love --- just as He is speaking to us today, and expects our love.

This is NOT just a mere liking or a casual preference. It is a purposeful devotion --- an intelligent comprehension of who He is. In response to His love, we keep His Commandments.

Note that the keeping of His commandments is **in response** --- our reaction --- to His love for us. We do **not** keep His Commandment in order to get (or earn) His love. That love is

already there. The Holy Spirit creates --- in our hearts --- the faith necessary to keep His Commandments. This love is born of the faith that comes to us when we are called by Jesus in our Baptism. There can be no love for Jesus without the presence of faith. Without trust in our Lord and Savior, there can be no love.

It's a pretty simple test, isn't it? Right here in this text, Jesus has given us the way to check our own spiritual pulse. It is the key to the whole New Testament message. The existence of love for Jesus is easy to determine: "You will guard My precepts...you will keep My commandments." There are no exceptions. There are no threats. There are no terrors. You can --- and will --- keep the commandments of God if you do, indeed, love Him.

It is the natural response to that love.

Then Jesus fills this spiritual sandwich with His promises. Between these two statements that give us the handhold on His love, we have His words of comfort and blessing:

1. You will receive another counselor to be with you forever
2. He lives in you
3. I will not leave you as orphans
4. I will come to you
5. You will see me
6. Because I live, you will live also
7. You are in Me, and I am in you

Too often when we hear these statements of Jesus --- the promises of comfort to the Disciples, and to us --- we flip through them with only a superficial passing interest. We zip through them so fast that we do not really hear what Jesus is telling us.

Stop a moment to look closely at this "filling" that is pressed between these two handholds of our "sandwich":

God is present and active in His world. There are times of discouragement when we are apt to forget that this is God's world. It is sometimes easy to drift into a mood of despair, as though this world were a big blue marble dropped from God's pocket. We slip into a belief that only secular forces control the day.

But our text today says that the creator God is at work through the Holy Spirit --- the Counselor --- the Spirit of Truth. God is present in our affairs through His Son, Jesus Christ --- the God who, in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth.

God is also present and active in His Church today. If we --- as Christians --- lose sight of that, we are in danger of falling into a mechanical, impersonal, ritualistic promoting of ancient traditions, leaving no place for the work that God has entrusted to us.

Granted, the Christian Church has always been a minority in the world. Perhaps it always will be. After all, there is so much from which to choose, if you are in the mode of church shopping. The Christian church does not have the worldly appeal that some people feel it needs. They just don't know the truth, and refuse to believe it when they hear it.

Evan as a minority, we have no delusions. As far as we can measure, God has always acted through a minority --- many times a persecuted minority. We have His Word and promise: He is working in and through us --- His very presence is assured in the life and work of His people.

God is at work right here in this Congregation! Yes, there are some areas of our fellowship that could stand improvement! It's a struggle. Sometimes we might even begin to wonder if God has overlooked this gathering of His people.

These words of promise are to us, also: "I will not leave you desolate. You are in Me, and I in you."

And, Oh! What a relief it is! No matter what happens, we know, from the words of God Himself, that God is present and active in His church --- right here --- right now.

God has not left you an orphan. He has not abandoned you: He has sent His Spirit **into** you. You have the power that can come only from God. It is all the power you will ever need.

This power lets you live...live as God meant you to live. His commandments no longer come across as a dreary duty --- or as confining regulations. Rather, they become welcome guidelines, the marks of a dynamic love relationship. "If you love me" begins our text, "you will obey what I command." The closing is the same message.

That message from Jesus is directed at our personal lives. God is with you ALL the time...not just while you are at church...not just when you are saying your prayers before meals...not just during your daily family devotions. His promise --- that He dwells in you --- means that He is there ALL the time:

...at work, where things don't always go right

...at home, where frustrations sometimes seem to peak

...in your neighborhood, where altercations (generated out of differences of opinion) get your stomach in knots.

He is there when you are riding in your car, walking down the sidewalk, sleeping in bed, or just standing around doing nothing.

That is His promise. He is active and participating in your life every day, all day long...60 minutes of every hour...1,440 minutes every day...10,080 minutes a week, 524,160 minutes a year. Every year. No time off. NO vacations. He said that He is in us, and we are in Him --- and He doesn't even take coffee breaks.

What a fantastic set of promises that Jesus has sandwiched between these two statements of, "If you love Me..." The test is simple: A true disciple --- one who really loves Jesus --- does more than make pretenses. He cherishes and guards every commandment of God with all of his heart, mind, and strength.

Every promise that is placed between these two handholds is grand and wonderful in itself. Each one points to something far greater: The divine love of God for His people.

These promises are given to us by the ultimate example of love. Jesus Christ died for the sins of ALL mankind. It is through the death of the Son of God that we see the severity of each and every sin we commit.

Christ has made Himself known to our souls as the most gracious Savior --- the most faithful Shepherd --- the most mighty King.

In that revealing, He has empowered us to be recipients of His love. Faith, love, hope, patience, and all Christian virtues are produced in the hearts of the Godly, and they increase from day to day.

As we find ourselves in a transient, fragmented society --- where relationships tend to be brief, fragile, and irresponsible --- we feel the frustration and pain involved in being a Christian today. Even in that frustration and pain we can reflect God's love to those around us.

Amen. May the peace of God, which passes all [human] understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen (Philippians 4:7)