

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 6th Sunday of Easter, April 30, 1989. Scripture Lessons: Acts 15:1-2, 22-29; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-27; John 14:23-29.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's the last day of April. Tomorrow's May day. Spring is here. The days are getting longer. They're getting warmer. The fragrance of blooming flowers fills the air. And in the Spring time a young person's fancy turns to love. An older person's does to. What does it mean to love? Well, if you've ever experienced the thrill of love you know what love is even if you can't define it. And yet we never stop trying to put into words and songs just what love is.

When I was young we had some really great love songs that spoke so powerfully to teen-age feelings. Some of you older people will remember one of my favorites from the fifties. They'd play it as the last dance. The Teddy Bears sang it,

To know, know, know you
Is to love, love, love you.
Just to see you smile,
Makes my life worthwhile.
To know, know, know you
Is to love, love, love you.
And I do.

Elvis Presley's love songs have become classics. Remember how he pleaded,

Don't be cruel, to a love that's true.
I don't want no other love...
Baby it's just you I'm thinking of.

And they're still singing about love today. There's a great love song that Bob Dylan sings on his Travelling Wilbury album. It's about the pain of losing love.

Congratulations, for breaking my heart.
Congratulations, for tearing it all apart.
Congratulations, you finally did succeed.
Congratulations, for leaving me in need.

The word's aren't Shakespeare, and he's not Pavorotti, but I love it. There's a great temptation for preachers to put down the love that pop

sings about and to say that it has nothing to do with Christian love. There's also a tendency to make fun of young people who feel love stirring within them. Sometimes we make the mistake of telling a teenager that what he or she is feeling isn't really love but *only* puppy love or infatuation or lust. But to them it's love. When you're a teenager in love you can't imagine ever loving anybody else. We grow up and we forget so soon the wonderful and delicious power of young love.

But one of the most powerful and dangerous lessons of love is that when we're crazy in love with somebody we do things they want us to do even when they ask us to do self-destructive things. Beware when someone, under a romantic moonlit night, says to you, "If you really love me, you'll do what I say." But you don't have to be a teenager. It may be your wife or husband, it may be your best friend who asks you to cheat, to be dishonest, to lie or do anything you know is wrong. And if you say, "No! I don't want to do it." The person you love may respond, "You don't really love me, do you? If you really loved me you'd do what I say." That's why it's so extremely important that we fall in love with the right person, with someone who really and truly loves us and wants the best for us. That's why the church has always been so concerned that young people marry someone who shares your faith in Christ... someone who values what Christ values... someone whose goals are compatible with God's will.

If someone really loves you they're not going to ask you to do anything that's going to leave you feeling cheap and tawdry. They're not knowingly going to tell you to do anything that you're going to be sorry for tomorrow or for the rest of your life. That doesn't mean that someone who really loves you won't ask you to do anything unpleasant. A person who really loves you may ask you to do something that you'd really rather not do. A dying parent may look at you and say, "If you love me, please be reconciled

to your brother." And that might be the most difficult thing in the world for you to do. But because you love your parent whom you know loves you... you do everything in your power to seek reconciliation. A person who really loves you may ask you to do something you don't want to do... like dust or weed the garden. And you do it, not without complaints, because you love the person. But if someone really loves you they'll never ask you do anything they feel will be harmful to you in the long run.

Now listen to what Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever loves me will obey my teaching." He said what millions of people have said to those who love them. "If you love me, you'll do what I say." I believe that the Holy Spirit made St John remember these words of Jesus because the Spirit wants us to know that Jesus says the same thing to his followers today. "Whoever loves me will obey my teaching."

Whenever someone says something like that to us you want to ask yourselves several important questions. You'll want to ask yourself, "How well do I really know this person who's asking me to do whatever they say? Is this person trustworthy? What do those who know this person best have to say about his or her character?" And above all you'll want to ask, "How do I know this person really loves me and will he or she still love me tomorrow?"

I'm so glad that when I ask those questions of Jesus I have utter confidence that I can trust him. When I look at men and women throughout the ages who've loved and obeyed Jesus I discover that not *one* of them ever finally regretted obeying anything Jesus taught. And the evidence of Christ's love for us is the fact that he died for us. The cross of Christ shows us that He loves us utterly and unconditionally. It proclaims that he'll still love us tomorrow and all of our tomorrows till the end of time and till the dawn of eternity. Nothing can separate us from the love of

Christ.

I'm so glad that I can obey every single command of Jesus knowing that he'll never ask me to do anything that he won't give me the strength or courage to do. Yes, he may ask me to do something dangerous, something risky, something I'd really rather not do. But when I obey Jesus, he never disappoints.

That's why if Jesus ever says to you what he said to the rich young ruler, "Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor and come follow me to Africa or Central America or to the inner city of Philadelphia" you can obey with confidence that Christ has something better to give you than what you now have. That's why we can confidently obey Jesus when he teaches us, "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." No matter what Jesus teaches... "love your enemies", "turn the other cheek", "do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth... instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven"... whatever he teaches, we can obey and know that it will be the best for us. And we'll have peace about it. Not the kind of peace that the world gives, but the peace of Christ. So don't worry! Be happy! Don't be afraid. Hear, then, what the Holy Spirit has caused us to remember this morning of what Jesus has taught us, "Whoever loves me will obey my teaching."

Let us pray: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your Holy Spirit who teaches us and causes us to remember all that you have taught and not just those things we like. And because we love you we will obey confident that you have come to give us life more abundant. Amen.