

John 14:15-21
Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 14, 2023

"It's not what you know but who you know." No doubt you have heard that comment over the years. Personal connections have helped many a person land a job. Or maybe it's getting tickets for a concert, perhaps even meeting the performer backstage afterwards or getting good seats at a restaurant. It's good to know the right people. The text for today points to benefits of an important relationship.

CONNECT WITH CHRIST

- I. In love
- II. In union
- III. In obedience

The first connection we come across is an important word: love. We are speaking of God's kind of love, described by scholars as one of intelligent comprehension and purposeful devotion. More concretely, we see it in the actions of Jesus. His love is unlimited, for he held back nothing, offering his life for us. It is unconditional, having no strings attached and not based on the worthiness of the object. God's kind of love is sacrificial. We had not earned or deserved it, but it came forth from his loving heart.

We respond to his love for us with love for him. There is plenty of reason for us to do so. Who has done more for us? Think of everything our Savior went through to rescue us from sin's consequences. There was the physical mistreatment and torture of death by crucifixion. He suffered emotionally as accusers lied about him, observers mocked him and his own followers deserted him. Worst of all, his own Father turned his back on Jesus when he hung on the cross bearing the sins of the world.

Yet love for Jesus is not natural. The world does not know him, he noted. An item I recently saw on Facebook offers an example. It claimed that since the extant writings of the New Testament date to about a century after Jesus walked this earth, we can't be sure if they are true or if he even existed as a real person. All of us enter life the same way: spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God. We were lost in sin and thus incapable of loving him or coming to him.

Jesus' work for us is what draws us to him. It is the Holy Spirit who does the convincing. God's Word is the source of our beliefs. It was given by inspiration of

the Spirit, who filled the writers with the message, even directing them to the words he wanted them to use. The Bible is not a made up account from the imagination of humans. It is God's own Word. Its lasting existence and impact upon the world are proof of its power. It is the Spirit's tool to touch the heart and bring us to faith.

That leads me to think today of the role of moms in sharing its truths. How many of us can remember our mothers teaching us Bible lessons, songs and prayers! Consistently she modelled Christian love and patience and encouraged godly behavior. Moms carry a tremendous impact on who we are. We thank you!

Love and faith go hand in hand. Where there is no faith, there is no real love. Connect with Christ. Hear and believe his Word.

II.

Connect also with him in union. To bring it about Jesus promised the Spirit to his followers. He was already in their hearts as believers but he promised a special outpouring, which came on Pentecost. The Savior had spoken of leaving the disciples. They had enjoyed his presence as he had trained them during the preceding three years. It was a blessed privilege but relatively brief. His leaving was necessary as he would die in payment for the world's sins. He would return and show himself alive in various settings, some of which we reviewed in the Gospel readings of recent weeks. Those appearances convinced them that he was truly alive. His general preaching to the crowds was done. After forty days he would ascend to heaven and they wouldn't see him visibly. He did promise "to be with you always" but it would be different, for they would see him with the eyes of faith rather than their physical eyes.

However, he was not abandoning them or leaving them as orphans. He promised to send the Counselor, meaning someone at their side with his comforting presence and guidance. That relationship would last forever. He was speaking of God the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit produces a union of God and believers, like that existing between Father and Son. "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." This union of Father and Son is beyond our comprehension. The persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct within the Godhead yet they are always one as they act in the world. They form the perfect team. They know each other, agree fully and act together. You might recall the time of prayer for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his death. With that horrid experience staring him in the face, and as God knowing fully all

that was involved, he prayed for another way of saving the world than through his personal suffering, but also asked, "Not my will, but yours be done." He was totally committed to carrying out his Father's plans. At an earlier time his disciples were concerned about his not eating. He told them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me." It was top on his list. He was dedicated to his purpose for coming to this earth.

There are similarities in the connection between Jesus and us. He lives in us, usually described as in our hearts. It is an awesome thought. When we come to faith in Jesus as our Savior he transforms our whole being and purpose for living. He gives us spiritual life. "Because I live, you also will live." We are no longer the walking dead. We believe that he is our Savior. We know what he has done for us and means to us. He aligns our will with his. Our past slavery to Satan was overturned. We can draw on the power of the indwelling Spirit to say no to temptations to sin. Matters of the soul take over the number one position in our lives. We gladly hear God's Word and apply it to our lives. Earthly matters are still an important part of our daily existence but we recognize they are not the be all and end all. Life's stuff is just a tool to use as we are passing through.

The spiritual life we experience now receives eternal life to come. Death becomes the doorway to heaven, for our soul at once as we take our last breath, to be joined by our resurrected body on the Last Day. What a home that will be! "Perfect" is the word often used to describe the life that awaits us in heaven. That adjective refers to our existence without sin, with the provision of all our needs and security in which we will live. Opposition will be non-existent and we will enjoy the beauty surrounding us and the population, for all fellow believers in the God of Scripture will surround us. "Perfect" will also describe the praise we offer together before God's throne and the pleasures that we enjoy.

III.

Back to earth, as we are still here. We also want to connect with Christ in obedience. Our transformed heart shows in our life. We want to serve Jesus. We are eager to do so. Our service is offered gladly and willingly. Jesus identified how the change becomes visible. "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." Let me use a Mothers' Day comparison. Suppose you take Mom out to brunch, buy her flowers and gifts and present her with cards that contain glowing sentiments. She expresses her thanks for all the attention and then asks you to take the wrapping paper out to the recycle bin and you respond, "Why should I do that? It was your present," might she not question whether you really meant any of the special treatment?

So it is with our Lord. Jesus called us to obey his commands. We turn to God's law to know what pleases him. Believers still have the sinful nature and get urges to do wrong. There is a tug of war going on for control of our behavior. We're like the rope being pulled in both directions. So we go to the Word to know wrongs to avoid and good things to do. Then follow through on that knowledge. Walk in right paths. Love God and your neighbor. Turn away from voices of the world denying God's truth and instead exalting human opinions and desires. Pursue Christian virtues. Stand up for your Savior. Avoid what is evil.

We view doing so as a joy and privilege. God is not restricting our freedom but opening the way to true happiness and fulfillment of the purpose for which he created us. It is real living, experiencing what God intended.

Living for the Savior may bring opposition. Satan's followers feel a condemnation when Christians refuse to join them in sinning. They may try to mask their guilt by speaking negatively against you, or they may try to bring you down to their ways of sin. Endure their taunts and temptations with the strength of the indwelling Spirit. It is given through the Gospel in Word and sacrament. Keep receiving God's means of grace. Come to the Lord's house for his message and for the support of your fellow believers as we journey together on a life of faith, connected with our Savior and with one another.

When you fail—and you will, sometimes horribly—go to the same Word for forgiveness and a fresh start. He freely gives it to you. That's the greatness of our Savior.

Nothing is more important than connecting with Christ. He is the one it is most important to know. Receive him in faith, grow in that faith and then glow in a life of service, to his glory.