

## Easter 6B 2018 Sermon

*John 15: 9 - 17 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

It doesn't take much reading of the Bible to discover that it is filled with metaphors, similes, and images! In the Old Testament, God is sometimes said to be a singer or a composer (Zephaniah 3:17, Deuteronomy 31:19), a house or a housebuilder (1 Chronicles 17:10b, Psalm 90:1), a spring of water (Jeremiah 2:13), a potter (Isaiah 64:8), a shepherd (Psalm 23), or a woman in labor (Isaiah 42:14). **Jesus** uses all *sorts* of similes in his attempts to describe the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is like... a mustard seed, or leaven mixed with flour, treasure hidden in a field, a pearl of great price, a net cast into the sea, a sower casting seeds which fall on all kinds of soil. In *last week's* Gospel, Jesus metaphorically said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." And we could go on and on! "All language about God is necessarily symbolic and figurative," writes Richard Rohr. "...Words are never the thing itself; they can only point toward the thing..."<sup>1</sup>

And so, today, in the tradition of the authors of the Bible, I would like to offer another image, in an attempt to better understand our Gospel and Epistle readings, and to provide another model by which we can understand our relationship with God.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples (and to us), "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."

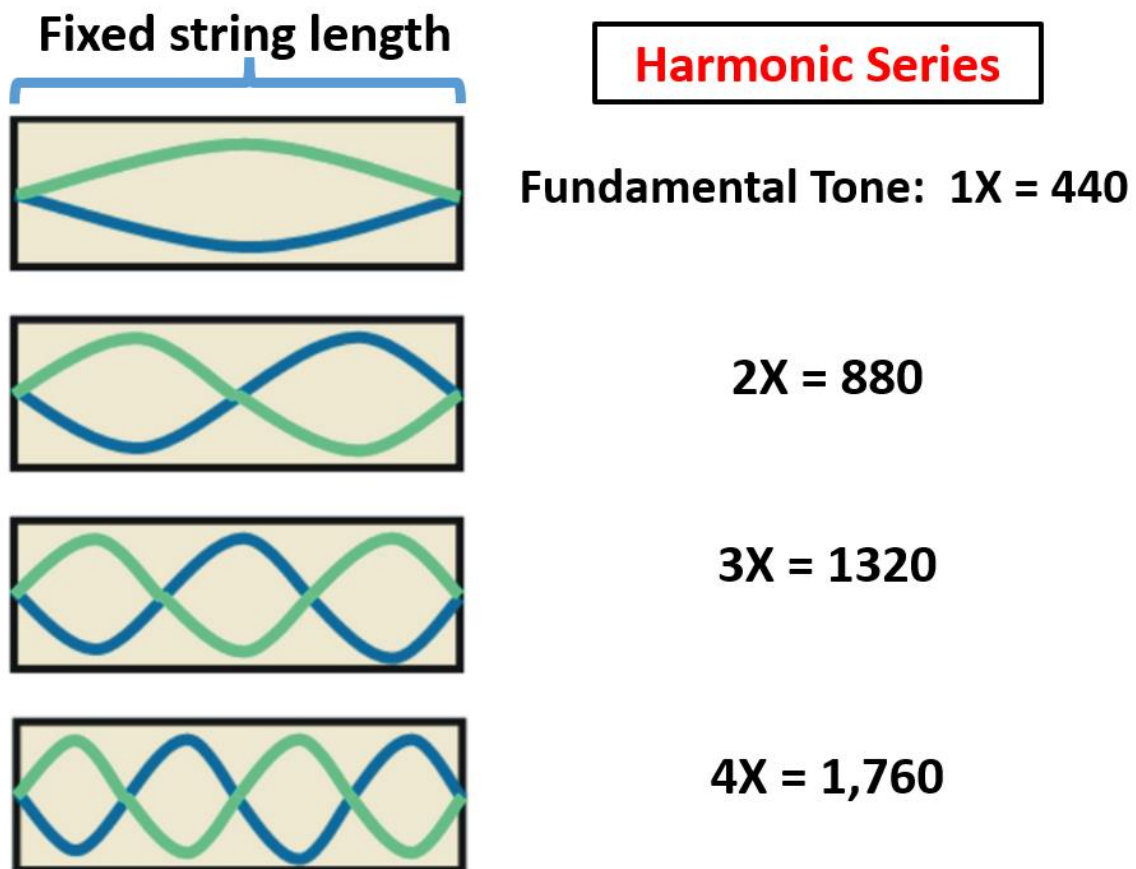
It's a formula Jesus uses throughout John's Gospel: "As the father has... so I have... and so you should..." Fr. John Shea writes, "[T]here is a higher order of things, and... human well-being depends on people aligning themselves with that order. To be separated from this higher order is to be lost; to positively participate in this order is to be found."<sup>2</sup>

In today's Gospel, we might think of Jesus' "commandments" as the *structure* of this "higher order of things," the "divine blueprint," if you will. "Keeping" Jesus' commandments would be aligning oneself with this divine blueprint.

But the image of "alignment" with a blueprint is a static, spatial image, and the love of God about which our Gospel and Epistle speak is anything **but** static! So, rather than "alignment," I would like to offer another image: the image of *resonance*. Resonance.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., the Greek philosopher Pythagoras discovered that when a fixed string vibrates, the pitch we hear correlates with the frequency at which the string vibrates. For instance, if a string vibrates 440 times per second, we hear this note "A." [PLAY "A" on the piano]

Now here's where resonance comes in: If we had a second piano in the room, and I struck an "A" on the *first* piano, the "A" string on the *second* piano would vibrate in what's called "sympathetic resonance" with the first, causing the same tone to sound on the second piano (albeit much more faintly.) But that's not all. [SHOW SLIDE]



A fixed string is not only capable of vibrating along its full length; it is also capable of vibrating at frequencies that are whole-number multiples of the string's length, as we see in this diagram. So if I lift the damper from the A440 string

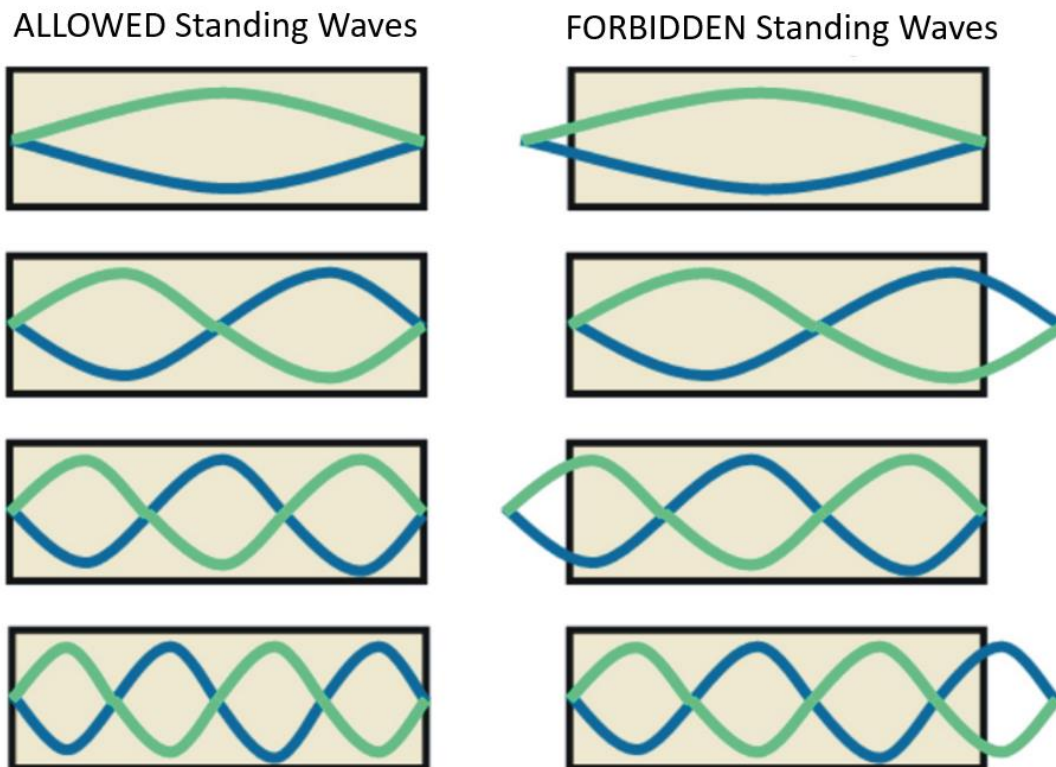
(allowing the string to vibrate freely) and strike the A880 string and let it go, stopping its vibration, we still hear (albeit faintly) the A880 pitch vibrating on the open A440 string. And if I hit the note that vibrates 3 times 440 (E) and then stop its vibration, we see that it, too, has caused the A440 string to resonate sympathetically. Those notes that vibrate in whole number multiples of the first note make up what is called a “harmonic series.” They are notes in harmony with one another!

In one of our hymns, we sing, “Come, thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace!” To “tune our hearts” to God’s grace is to bring them into vibrational resonance with the harmonic series of Divine Love. They then “abide” in his love, to use Jesus’ words from our Gospel. We might even say that “keeping Jesus’ commandments” consists of this very process of tuning our hearts to the vibrations of Divine Love, so that our lives sympathetically resonate with Christ’s life, which perfectly resonates with his Heavenly Father. And the sympathetic vibrations of our heart-strings can, in turn, cause the tuned heartstrings of others to vibrate, also; thus sharing God’s Love-song with others, loving one another, as Jesus in our Gospel commands.

Those of you who have ever attended an orchestra concert know that before each concert begins, the concertmaster plays an “A” on her violin, and each member of the orchestra then tunes his or her instrument to that pitch. God, the Concertmaster of the Universe, plays his heavenly “A,” and in so doing creates the harmonic series with which all creation resonates. Indeed, in another of our hymns, we sing, “This is my Father’s world, and to my listening ears all nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres!” Now, the author of that hymn didn’t invent the phrase, “music of the spheres;” it’s an **ancient** idea going back *at least* to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century astronomer and mathematician Ptolemy. But the concept was developed most famously by the 17<sup>th</sup>-Century astronomer and mathematician Johannes Kepler, who found common rules between music and the movement of the planets which he called “the music of the spheres.” In his 5-volume work, *The Harmony of the World*, Kepler attempted (and these are his own words) “to erect the magnificent edifice of the harmonic system of the musical scale . . . as God, the Creator Himself, has expressed it in harmonizing the heavenly motions.”<sup>3</sup> In another hymn, we sing, “His law he enforces, the stars in their courses, the sun in his orbit, obediently shine.”<sup>4</sup>

In last week’s Epistle, we read, “We love because he first loved us.” The initial Love-song was sung by God; and since you and I were created in the image of God, we were created to resonate with the very vibrations of that Divine Love-song, the “music of the spheres,” the “Harmony of the World.” We came from the womb tuned to resonate sympathetically with that Divine Love-song. Indeed, in C.S. Lewis’ book *The Magician’s Nephew*, Aslan the Lion **sings** the world of Narnia into existence.

But if “keeping Jesus’ commandments” and “abiding in his love” is equivalent to tuning our heart-strings to “the music of the spheres” so that we might resonate with him who, in turn, resonates with the Father, there is also the *disharmonious* possibility of having our hearts and lives “*out* of tune” with the commandments of God’s harmonic sequence. [SHOW SLIDE]<sup>5</sup>



In the first column of this diagram is the harmonic sequence which we saw before, in which there is sympathetic resonance; but in the second column, we see wavelengths that are **not** whole-integer multiples of the wave at the top of the left column. What happens when I once again hold down the “A” key and then strike a string that vibrates at one of the frequencies in the right hand column? [PLAY B] There is no resonance. Interestingly, the term that physicists use for the waves in the first column is “ALLOWED” standing waves; while the term for waves like those in the second column is “FORBIDDEN” standing waves. In the “allowed” column, Jesus’ “commandments” are kept, and there is resonance with Divine Love; while in the “forbidden” column, Jesus’ commandments are *not* kept, and there is **no** resonance.

Richard Rohr writes (and I paraphrase a bit): “All you can really do in the spiritual life is resonate to the true pitch, to receive the always-present [music of the spheres, the divine vibrations]. Once you are tuned, you *will* receive, and it has nothing to do with worthiness or the group you belong to, but only inner resonance... We must begin with the knowledge that the [Composer of the Divine Love-song] is absolutely and always present and [singing]; the only

[variable] is with... you and me, [whether or not our hearts are *tuned* to **resonate** with the notes of that Divine Love-song].”<sup>6</sup>

The fact that you and I were created in the image of God means that we were *born* with our heart-strings tuned to resonate with the vibrations of God’s Love-song. We only get *out*-of-tune when we allow our heart-strings to be adjusted to vibrate to the world’s siren songs of wealth, power, comfort, competition, comparison, ego – you know the seductive tunes as well as I do. Prayer is the receptive and humble process of letting God “tune our hearts to sing his grace,” and then resonating with the Divine harmonic sequence, the music of the spheres. Fr. Rohr notes that “Without [prayer and] contemplation, the best you can do is to know by comparison, calculation, and from the limited viewpoint of ‘you.’ Prayer knows reality in a totally different way.”<sup>7</sup> Not by comparison or calculation, but by resonating with the vibrations of God’s Love-song, and singing it back to into the world.

AMEN

<sup>1</sup> Richard Rohr’s Daily email Meditation, January 11, 2017

<sup>2</sup> John Shea, *Eating with the Bridegroom*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005, p. 132

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.amarantypublishing.com/kepler.htm>

<sup>4</sup> “Let all things now living,” by Katherine Davis

<sup>5</sup> Wave diagrams from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Allowed\\_and\\_forbidden\\_standing\\_waves.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Allowed_and_forbidden_standing_waves.png)

<sup>6</sup> Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation, “A Tuning Fork,” Friday, June 30, 2017

<sup>7</sup> Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation, “A Tuning Fork,” Friday, June 30, 2017