

Easter 6, Year C

May 26, 2019

John 14:23-29 *Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.*

When I returned home from our Regional Confirmation yesterday, I found cars lining both sides of the street in front of my house and around the corner for blocks. My neighbors were holding a high school graduation party for their son. This past Wednesday night, when I drove to Denver for my weekly dinner with my Denver family, we celebrated the college graduation of one of my "nieces."

It's graduation time.

Now, we all know the mixture of feelings which come when you graduate from high school or college. There is the excitement of accomplishment: "I have my diploma! All those years of hard work have paid off!" There is the self-satisfaction of knowing that you are growing up or entering a new stage of life. All that you have learned has prepared you to take this next step.

And yet *part* of you is not sure you *want* to take the next step on the sometimes-frightening path of growth. Once you graduate from High School or College, you cannot go back and be a student there again. There is no return to the old way of life.

I think that Jesus' disciples must have felt the same way in the scene described in our Gospel reading today, in which Jesus says his farewell to his disciples on the night before he will be crucified. Jesus has been their teacher, coach, and mentor in the school of Life. Now he tells them that he is leaving them! There will be no return to the way of life the disciples have experienced for the past three years: following Jesus day in, day out, sitting at his feet as he teaches them, soaking in his loving presence.

What in the *world* will they do when he is gone?

Jesus perceives the sense of loss his disciples are already anticipating as he speaks

of his impending departure to return to his heavenly Father; and so, he reassures them that they are not *losing* him – they are *graduating*. Just as graduating high school and college students take with them into their uncertain future the words of their parents and their teachers who have taught them, so Jesus' graduating *followers* take with **them** the words that *Jesus* has taught them.

“Those who love me will *keep* my word,” Jesus says, “and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

The disciples have learned much from following Jesus in his 3 years of ministry on earth. But God's ultimate will for them is not that they live their whole lives walking around in Jesus' shadow. God's will for them—and for all *us* who are followers of Jesus—is that we **become** the presence of Christ in our world, today; that we *embody* the words of Christ, each in our uniquely-gifted way! St. Paul writes that our goal as Christians is that all of us come “to *maturity*, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13)

But maturity is a difficult thing; life beyond graduation is not so easy. No longer do you take tests of your knowledge *on paper*; you are tested *in life*. You must use the *skills* you have learned to make a living on your own. You must use the *values* you have learned to live a life of integrity. Maturity means that you no longer simply *talk* the talk, but *walk* the talk. It is true not only for those graduating from High School or College, but for each of **us** who desires to be a mature Christian, growing in faith and in God.

It is easy for us to come to church each Sunday and hear what Jesus says, figuratively sit at his feet, and then go back home again and *forget* about Jesus' words until *next* Sunday. Our weekly worship service can become, in effect, what Jesus' physical presence was for his disciples: as long as Jesus was there, *he* could solve all the problems, answer all the questions, so *they* didn't have to. And as long as the Church is there for us each Sunday, *it* has the answers, *it* has the Life-giving sacraments; and so, **we** don't have to *live out* the answers in our *own* life; we don't have to become *living* sacraments of Christ's presence, since the sacrament is kept safely in the tabernacle behind the altar, ready to meet our needs. We don't have to take Jesus' words too *personally* – we hear them each Sunday, and that's sufficient. We don't have to *keep* his word. *Keep* – that word, according to one definition in Webster's dictionary, means “to apply oneself to.” To *keep* Jesus' words means to *apply* ourselves to them – to put them into practice in our lives.

When I was in college, I took three semesters of Calculus; today, I don't remember one thing about the subject. “Use it or lose it” the saying goes, and since I have *not* used it, I have lost it.

The same is true of Jesus' teachings – we use them, or we lose them. According to today's Gospel reading, *keeping* Jesus' word is in some way **bound up** with

God's love for us, intertwined with Jesus and his Father making their home in us! Jesus says, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." *Keeping* Jesus' word, *applying* oneself to Jesus' word, is a fundamental trait of the mature Christian, the graduate and post-graduate Christian. This is stated over and over again in St. John's writings. Here are just a few of those verses, in which I substitute Webster's definition for the word "keep": Jesus says, "They who have my commandments and *apply themselves* to them are those who love me..." (14:21) And in his First Letter, St. John writes, "...Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we *apply ourselves* to his commandments... Those who say 'I know him' but do **not** *apply themselves* to his commandments are liars... but those who *apply themselves* to his word, in them truly the love of God is perfected." (1 John 2:3-5a)

Now, as we know, it is a custom at graduations that some notables (often the valedictorian or the commencement speaker) give a "charge" to the graduates: a wise instruction to those who are embarking on a new stage of their lives. And, in effect, this is what Jesus, in our Gospel, gives to his disciples: a charge; because it is, for the disciples, graduation time.

In his charge, Jesus says to them: "If you love me, you will **apply yourself** to my word... and my Father will love you, and we will come to you and make our home with you." After he *physically* leaves them, Jesus can make his home **within** them: within their hearts and souls. If his **words** live in them, then **Jesus** lives in them.

And that is **our** goal as mature Christians: that Christ live in us, and we in him. St. Paul wrote to the Galatians (2:20): "... it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."

Now, in reading through John's Gospel these past many Sundays, we have seen how John loves to use words that have more than one meaning. In today's reading, there is more than one meaning for the word "keep." We get a clue to another meaning if we consider our English word "keepsake." When used in *this* sense, "to keep" implies "to treasure." In fact, in Luke's story of Jesus' **birth**, we are told that the shepherds hear the message of the heavenly angel, go to the manger to see this child, and tell Mary about the message of the angel. And depending on the English translation we read, we either find, "Mary *kept* these things in her heart" or "Mary *treasured* these things in her heart." (Luke 2:19; see also Luke 2:51) To keep Jesus' word means not only to apply ourselves to his word; it is to treasure his word in our hearts.

Yesterday, we had a wonderful Regional Confirmation service in Pueblo. Trina was Confirmed and Leslie made a public Reaffirmation of her baptismal vows. And then we **all** renewed our *own* baptismal vows. It dawned on me that that Regional Confirmation Service was in many ways like the commencement

ceremonies taking place at high schools and colleges around the nation that day, and Jesus was our unseen commencement speaker. His charge to us was to keep his word in our lives, and we accepted that charge when we renewed our baptismal vows. For, when we live out our vow to “seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves,” we are *keeping* Jesus’ word. When we live out our vow to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being,” (BCP p. 305) we are treasuring Jesus’ word and *applying ourselves to* his word.

And, my friends, I believe that, through the words of today’s Gospel, Jesus is giving **us** that same charge *today*. “*Keep* my word,” he says. “Hold it fast in your heart and treasure it. And *apply yourself to* my word every moment of your life. For my word is not onerous, it is not burdensome [Matt. 11:30]; it is a **gift** which, in receiving and treasuring, and then *using* in your daily lives, brings both me and my Father into the home of your hearts.”

AMEN