

John 14:15-21

Jesus is Within You

I love the movie “Stranger than Fiction.” I love my wife. I love all of you. I even love my dog. When I use the word “love,” I can use it in a number of different ways. You love your spouse differently than you love your pets. You love your entertainment, and you love your favorite food, but you’re not going to watch a pizza or eat your favorite movie.

It seems to me, that when we say we love something, the one common factor is that whatever it is—a person, an animal, an object—that thing we love has become a part of us. When we define ourselves, often we turn to those things which we love to explain who we are. Those beloved things are within us.

Jesus spoke of love, and he uses some of the same language. He says that he is in those who love him. Just like the things and the people you love are within you, Jesus says that you who love him have him within you as well. The question is, what does Jesus mean when he says he is within us? Jesus is saying that you know him, and that you obey him.

The disciples loved Jesus. They knew him well. They knew his teaching. These were the men who had been with him for years, learning from him and hearing him teach. That gospel had worked in their hearts so that they put their faith in Jesus as their Savior from sin. Their hearts had been changed, and their dear friend and teacher, Jesus, had become part of them. Jesus was within those disciples.

Soon, however, those disciples would be without Jesus. John chapter 14 records for us some of the events of Maundy Thursday evening. Jesus was giving his disciples encouragement before his arrest, trial, and execution. In the coming 24 hours, these disciples, though they knew Jesus and his teaching, would be overcome with doubt, grief, and sorrow.

The disciples, at seeing Jesus falsely accused and executed for crimes he did not commit, would forget much of Jesus’ teaching. Though they knew the gospel he taught them, their sorrow and grief and horror would cause them to despair. Though Jesus told them why he needed to suffer and die and that he would rise again, the devil convinced them his death was the end. They would think that Jesus, in whom they had put their faith, had left them orphaned.

The devil works hard in the hearts of believers to make them doubt what they know. You know the gospel Jesus teaches. Jesus is within you: you believe that he died for your sins and rose again. But just like those disciples, whom the devil led into doubt and despair, we often find ourselves doubting what we know. We have learned that Jesus has saved us from sin, death, and the devil, but we don’t always feel the weight of that truth.

My sinful nature craves the emotional response to knowledge. The devil uses that craving to make me doubt. We're like those disciples, who felt orphaned at the loss of their Jesus. The disciples thought Jesus had so much potential, and that potential was wasted when he died. The devil comes to accuse us, that Jesus' death, though we know it happened, must not mean anything to us. Maybe it comes when I don't feel saved. Maybe it comes when I feel my sins are too great to forgive. Maybe it comes when I feel like I need something more than knowing Jesus. All of those feelings are really the same: the feeling that Jesus isn't really within me, not in any meaningful way.

I often start to think that, if I don't feel the peace and joy of knowing the gospel, do I really believe? I tend to wonder whether Jesus really is within my heart if I can't feel him there. Sometimes I wonder: What good is knowing the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection if I don't feel any happier when I'm depressed? Or maybe the concern is that someday you'll run into some trial or temptation that will destroy your faith. Either way, the troubles of life make us feel orphaned by Jesus, as if he were not within us.

Jesus promised he would not leave his disciples as orphans. He would send the Counselor to them. The Holy Spirit comes to us through the gospel to remind us that Jesus is within us. To remind us of the things we need to know: Jesus' death means our redemption; Jesus conquered death for us; Jesus' work was not in vain.

That word, "Counselor", calls to mind the picture of a courtroom. A legal counselor knows the law and speaks for his client. The person standing before the judge does not need to know the law, because his Counselor knows it and communicates it to him. The Holy Spirit serves as our Counselor. He knows the gospel and he shares it with us.

I don't always feel Jesus within me. I easily forget the beautiful reality of the gospel. The Holy Spirit then does his work through Word and Sacrament to remind me what Jesus has done for me. Jesus did not leave his disciples as orphans. On Easter, he rose from the dead and revealed himself to his disciples. We read again and again how Jesus appeared to his disciples and once again taught them about what his death and resurrection meant for them. He continued to use the gospel to strengthen their faith.

The Holy Spirit does the same for you today. When you feel knowing is not enough, or when the weight of the world threatens to crush you, turn to the gospel. In the Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit comes to remind you of Jesus' great love for you. The Holy Spirit strengthens you through the means of grace, reminding you that Jesus is within you.

Jesus' presence within you means that you have faith in the redemption he's won for you. See how Jesus loves you: he bought you back from sin, death, and the devil with his holy blood and innocent death. To know the love Jesus has for you is

life-changing. When you learn of Jesus' death and resurrection, it leads you to love him back. Your love for Jesus leads you to obey what he teaches you.

You learn what Jesus teaches you through the Bible. We study the Bible in many ways and places: worship, Bible Class, the Catechism. Imagine being in the shoes of the disciples, though. They had classes like no other. They got to hear Jesus' teaching while they sat at his feet and heard him firsthand. They learned from him for years. Much of Jesus' teaching dealt with what he would do for his disciples, but he also gave them a few commands.

Jesus gave them one specific command just before our lesson. He told his disciples that this was a new command: to love one another just as he loved them. There was no way they could misunderstand such a command. Jesus showed them his love for them in so many ways: teaching them, befriending them, serving them. Even more, dying for them. As we've already seen, Jesus was preparing his disciples for his death and resurrection by his teaching.

Jesus wasn't just preparing his disciples for his crucifixion. He was also preparing them for his ascension. He told them, "In a little while, the world will see me no longer, but you will see me." Because the disciples knew Jesus, they would see him with the eyes of faith. Their job after his ascension would be to spread the love of Christ throughout the world: to make Jesus known to those who cannot see him.

The mission of those first disciples is ours, too. We are called to make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey everything Jesus has commanded. Because Jesus lives within you, you want to obey that command. At the same time, there is a part of you that doesn't want to show the love of Christ to others. Every day I make a selfish decision, rather than living in humility and self-sacrifice. Every single day, I struggle with doing good, and end up doing more evil. At the end of the day, I look back at the sins I've just committed and wonder how and why I fell into sin again; how I could be so foolish, so wicked, so sinful.

And then I read the Scriptures. John wrote in his first epistle: "Whoever . . . sees his brother in need but closes his heart against him—how can God's love remain in him?" John also wrote, "No one who lives in him (Jesus) keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him." When I examine my life according to what God says, I have to wonder if Jesus really is within me. If I sin against my neighbor and against my God day after day, hour after hour. If every thought is tainted by the evil residing in my own heart, can I really say that I love Jesus?

John wrote those words in as a humbling reminder of who we are as sinners. While we remain sinners this side of heaven, John also has encouragement for us, "If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts." Jesus put it this way in our lesson: "The one who has my commands and holds on to them is

the one who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by my Father. I too will love him.” This struggle you feel over your sin means that you have Jesus’ commands written on your heart. He put them there when he made known to you his great love. When you learned that Jesus died and rose for you, he gave you a New Man who wants to do as Jesus commands.

The Father already loves you, because he loves his Son, Jesus. Jesus took your place and obeyed the law perfectly. He was tempted as you are every minute of every day, but committed no sin. Jesus rose from the dead, which showed that God was pleased with him. Then, Jesus ascended into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God for you. Jesus sits at God’s right hand to represent you before the Father, so that both may love you.

Jesus’ position at God’s right hand also means that he rules all things for you. He even rules in your heart. He comes to you in his Word and in the Sacrament to establish and strengthen his rule within you. His gospel tells you what he’s done for you, gives you a heart of thanks and obedience, and strengthens you to keep his commandments. You know what Jesus has done for you and what he commands because he reigns as king within your heart. His love overflows so that you love, too.

This week, we recognize the confirmation of ten young people. Young brothers and sisters who have shown that they know Jesus. Who will show that they want to obey him by hearing his word and receiving his body and blood in the sacrament. This week we can see them boldly confess that Jesus is within them and that they want to know and obey him as they use the Means of Grace. Let us all remember to use God’s Word daily and receive the sacrament regularly, so that he may remain within us.

Jesus does all of the work within us. He sums his work up in one sentence: “because I live, you also will live.” Jesus lives! He rose from death and ascended into heaven to live and rule eternally. He is not a king who lives far away and only comes when he wants something from you. Jesus is within you, ruling in your heart and blessing you to know and receive his love day after day. You now live for Jesus, because Jesus lives for you and within you.