

Sunday, May 9, 2025 Sermon
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Keep my commandments and I will abide in you. If I abide in you, you will keep my commandments. The law is comprised of boundaries. Staying in those boundaries is where your righteousness is practiced. It is the foundation upon which a faithful life is built, for the law speaks of the character of God. Outside of those boundaries is where unrighteousness abounds. Yes, your behavior will reflect who you are, what you believe, and your attitude toward God and others. In simple summation, the Lord wants us to be obedient to the order He has established. Knowing we often fail, He gives us grace, not to change the law, but to begin again in living the way our Lord created us to live.

It is not that we have to obey in order to gain God's love, for God is love and His love has already been lavished upon us. It is that because we love the Lord, we do what is pleasing to Him. But, the wisdom of the Lord is essential for us to better understand. Without wisdom, we can quickly fall into a trap of making up our own boundaries and seeking to conform others to our ideal of how things are supposed to be. Another name in Scripture for the Holy Spirit is Wisdom. Without wisdom, it will always end in failure because we humans, steeped in an age of sin, do not understand the true boundaries of the Lord.

Children were playing in the field next to the school. They ran, jumped, and did what children do. Over time the road next to the field became busier and busier. It turned into a major thoroughfare. As the road got busier, the children, with increasing fear, drew closer and closer to the school when they went out to play. They knew that they were to stay away from the busy traffic. They wanted safety. Finally, the school fenced in the field as a playground area. The children then spread out and played the whole field once again. They clearly saw the boundary between safe and unsafe. We, in the church, sometimes do not define God's boundaries and people feel unsafe. Sometimes the church, often in reaction to something else, constricts the boundaries and God's people feel constricted.

There is great freedom when you know God's boundaries. You are free when you know where the place of danger is. There may be those who challenge the boundaries, but our Lord has set firm boundaries for our lives *and for our sake*. He loves us enough to keep us safe. When you stray – like the one sheep in ninety-nine – the Lord will come and by grace, restore you.

Rather than seeking to obey the law for yourself, which often leads to becoming a pharisee – which is not exactly a good thing when you read the New Testament – perhaps we can look at all of Jesus' commandments in a different way.

You know the Lord has told us to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. He has also told us to love our neighbors as ourselves. He puts this first. It is through this lens that we begin to learn what true obedience means. The basis of all relationships is love. Love never seeks its own. Love seeks for the other. That means that our Lord intends for us to get out of ourselves and care for others. We may not know what heaven will be like, but we can imagine that it is filled with those who love the Lord and all others faithfully. Therefore, they are outside of themselves and serving others as they would want to be served. This is the example Jesus gives us. He first loved us. He wants us to love Him and others.

There is a principle here that often gets overlooked. Look through the eyes of honor to honor others for their own sake. One can often tell that another has been in the military because those trained in the military know how to respect authority. The respect for authority is a beginning place. If someone holds a public office and you do not like their policies, that is okay,

but you and I never have permission to dishonor the one whom the Lord has appointed to a position of authority. That is why we pray for our president and other public officials in public service each week. Have your opinions – for you will – but never give into the temptation to dishonor another. At the very least, always respect the office the person holds. We are commanded to honor our parents. It begins there.

When you meet another who's behavior is not to your liking, remember that they are a precious one for whom the Lord died. Respect that our Lord has made them an image-bearer. They too have the opportunity for His salvation, just as you and I do. But, honor this by treating another as you would want to be treated. Yes, you have your opinions, but the Lord has the final word on all matters.

We live in a world that is constantly seeking to tear down the boundaries that God has set in place. Through the lens of the Old Testament, if left unchecked, we know that this leads to tyranny. For if we do not hold fast to the place of safety, why should we expect to stay safe? I am not talking about the world out there, but the community in which you dwell. Yes, the world is filled with commandment breakers. I am one and so are you. That's the problem. But, our Lord has given us His salvation and by grace, we begin again and seek to practice the Lord's righteousness. We seek to live in the safety of His boundaries. Having learned, often the hard way, what is the place of safety, let us not be rigid. The Lord is the One who will lead all of those who are His. He will bring them to where they need to be. As we have been given grace, so also, we give others grace. People will do what they will do. Love them and always point to our Risen Savior who has come so that all those who hear His voice would come off of the busy streets of this world to the place of safety in Him. But the particular things of obedience and disobedience are between the Lord and the others. Your part is staying in the place of safety – the commandments of the Lord – and sharing the truth that in the Lord, there is love, safety, and joy.

You see, the Lord *has* chosen you. I often hear a cry that this is unjust. "Why didn't the Lord choose me?" The Lord offers salvation to all. Will you honor the Lord and have Him be Lord of your life? The confession of Thomas says it all and we do well to mirror what he said when He said, "My Lord and my God." This is the greatest boundary of all. There is no god above the Lord God Almighty, Creator of the universe, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

What a privilege we have been given through this grace! To have revealed who God is, His salvation, and the offer to walk with Him all the days of our lives, is to know joy and love itself. These things are not ideas, but the living relationship that never ends when we live in, with, and through the Lord.

I believe that the point our Lord is making is that when we live in this eternal relationship, our search for meaning and purpose is complete. In Him you have life that springs to life eternal. When the search has ended, then the journey of living the new life He gives begins. In Him you have the purpose of eternity. In Him, you have complete hope. We are called to abide in Him. We are taught to be immersed in Him knowing that He is already fully immersed in us. We are then told to obey His direction, live in the boundaries He sets, and be content in all things. He, the author and finisher of our faith, will lead us all the days of our lives.

Respect authority. Honor others as you want to be honored. Do as the Lord commands and you will be in the blessing of our Lord. Yes, this is hard. Daily, we must die to self, sin, death, and the devil. The Lord will take us into a new place where a new life is lived. When we live, dare I say, the law of love, we do not understand it as a precept, but as the way of love itself.

Good order and doing what needs to be done for its own sake, for the sake of the Lord, and for the sake of the other, is where we find joy. From those who prepare food and treats to those who play music, and everyone else who serves the Lord, there is great joy in living out what the Lord has given us to do. Each is to do their part, for this is how the kingdom heaven works. Loving one another as we are loved is the relationship into which we are invited. When we abide in this order of things, we are blessed. And we have been blessed. We have been blessed to be a blessing to others.

Never forget that our Lord has told us these things and the purpose of them. The commandments are not to show how good we are, but a means of reflecting how good He is. Our obedience is directed to the Lord. No matter what He asks of you, will you do it? You have been chosen through the waters of your baptism. Will you live His choice, or yours? Will you obey the commandments of the Lord and be His friend? Amen.