

Karen Hollis – Sermon

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17

May 6, 2018

We spent last week in the vineyard, learning about how the vine grows and is tended by the Vine Grower. We learned about the trellis that guides the vine as it grows. The Greek word for trellis is related to the word rule; a rule of life is then a trellis to guide us as we grow. Because of the way the lectionary divides up the readings, we are in a sense still in the vineyard, as the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of John continues on this week.

So, let us pray: may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

When we think generally of God's commands, the big 10 might come to mind: I am the Lord your God, keep the Sabbath, honour your parents, don't kill or steal, etc. In fact, around the same time Moses revealed the 10 commandments that we're familiar with, God also shared there at Mount Sinai 603 more. God's commands or mitzvah in the Jewish tradition include things like "having children, declaring God's oneness, resting on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, not eating pork, building a temple in Jerusalem, appointing a king, obeying the sages and providing an interest-free loan."<sup>1</sup> These may sound arbitrary, but in the context in which they were given, they have practical benefit for the person doing them, as well as the whole world.

In the Jewish tradition these Mitzvahs help one remain in a state of connection with God and community. A participant in a mitzvah-based society must continue participating in ongoing study of the commands, because one cannot perform a command unless they learn about them first, and then they must continue learning as applications of mitzvahs change. When one performs a mitzvah, it can be known as a good deed, a way of serving one's community in obedience to God. It's a layered system of obedience to God, developing the self and learning God's word and way in people.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus was raised in this mitzvah-based culture – he learned and studied in the way of his ancestors, and as he developed his own relationship with God, he realized God was calling people beyond a mitzvah-based existence to something more basic, and more fundamental . . . love . . . specifically 'love each other as I have loved you.' (Jn 15:12) Jesus' new command is blessed with simplicity, if not with ease; when was it easy to treat everyone and everything as beloved throughout each day? I doubt even Jesus found it easy, but he commands it all the same.

There's an interesting detail here that I'll just mention. Nowhere in the Christian scriptures does Jesus say, you don't have to follow those other commands anymore. He wasn't telling Jews to abandon their way of life, rather helping them to re-frame it with a new command. At the same time, Jesus and his followers after him, discerned that Jesus' new command is for all, not just those who come from a Jewish context, as we learned in the Acts reading this morning. God says, whoever you are and whatever your background, My love is for you: no matter who you are, where you come from, or what you've done, you are my child, my beloved and I cherish you. God's invitation continues, not simply for us to receive unconditional love, but to live it and share it. It is a command,

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/1438516/jewish/Mitzvah.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1438516/jewish/Mitzvah.htm), accessed on May 5, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

but it is also a gift; God's earlier Mitzvahs are not meant to be burdensome, but they are a commitment, they are a way of life that brings people together in God, for the good of everyone. The same is with this new command: living in and sharing God's universal love is not burdensome – it is a delight.

Before we can share God's love with each other, we need to know what it is we are sharing. We need to cultivate God's love in our lives; indeed, we are commanded by Jesus to love God with all that we are and everything we have, as written in Mark 12: "One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'"

Cultivating the love of God in our lives isn't magic and it isn't a secret. It's the Rule of Life that we talked about last week. Seeking God's love and remaining close to God's love is synonymous with living our own personal Rule of Life, which includes work/activity, tending relationships, rest and prayer/study. It seems the Rule of Life could also be known as the Rule of Love, because the product is loving. We work God's heart through a Rule of Life and the product is loving.

Years ago, I was on the leadership team of a women's retreat in Oregon. Our keynote speaker for the weekend was an energetic, dynamic woman from the east coast. She is a well-known church leader and speaker. At dinner on the second evening she approached me to say she wasn't able to make it to the healing service that night. After an intense afternoon of ministry with our women, she had given all she had, and needed to be alone to recharge. I thanked her for her ministry and bid her a good night, marvelling as she went at her clarity and ability to set boundaries on what she was able to give. Now, reflecting back, I recognize this as her Rule of Life in action – the Rule keeps her in balance and when she is out of balance, she knows how to restore it.

Jesus' new command in this morning's scripture is, 'love each other as I have loved you.' I think it's logical and natural to ask, how does Jesus love the disciples during his life? Honestly, I found a similar pattern:

- sees people, heals people, teaches them about God
- preaches the kingdom, offers a new paradigm in God
- challenges the status quo, to which the people are bound

Work

- eats with them, the ones he now calls friends
- serves them and offers himself for their salvation

Relationships

- fasts, models the importance of prayer and closeness with God

Rest & Prayer

Work, relationships, rest and prayer: a Rule of Life and a Rule of Love, the product of which is fruit that is rich and nourishing. Jesus says, "you did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." The fruit is agape, love overflowing; the unconditional love of God for all people; love as revealed in Jesus, which is selfless and a model for everyone. So, God, teach us to love in abundance. Thanks be to God!

