

You in Me and I in You [Scott Kinder-Pyle in Dialogue with Joshua Barnes]
John 14:15—21; Psalm 115

15 “If you love me, you will keep[a] my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

18 “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. 19 In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21 They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me, and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Every Sunday, believe it or not, there’s a ‘DIALOGUE’ sermon. The prefix DIA means PASSING THROUGH. And the root word LOGUE is derived from the Greek LOGOS, which refers to a word, or in our case this morning, THE WORD. And so, each and every Sunday, what we experience is nothing more and nothing less than the WORD—or the revelation of God—PASSING THROUGH at least one, or maybe more human beings.

And, as every psychologist, sociologist, or psychotherapist can tell us—as any new-born infant can tell us—each human being relies on RELATIONSHIP. You and I are relational creatures—and the fact that we sometimes find it hard to relate—is a great irony, a great tragedy, a great comedy. But it’s also a great OPPORTUNITY—in that whenever I struggle with my interpersonal relationships, or whenever they remain shallow and on-the-surface, I can wonder about the BIG PICTURE and the possibility of how God desires to salvage my relationships and to deepen them: ***“If you love me, you will keep my commandments...”***

Jesus offered these words in dialogue with his disciples. And, in a similar way this morning, Joshua Barnes and I are going to have a conversation. It will be an exchange of ideas and feelings that have been prompted by a *'commandment'* to love God and neighbor as self and to lay down one's life, but in the background, please keep in mind that since our very beginnings, since he and I had been conceived in our mother's wombs, through all the ups and downs of our individual lives, we've been headed for this time and this place. And so, Josh, here we go!

1. Scott to Joshua: I recall, just before Easter, I had the privilege of baptizing you with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And I'm wondering if you can describe why you wanted to go through that experience and become a part of the ministry here at Northwood...

[Joshua responds...and then asks a question of Scott...]

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you and he will be in you.”

One of the weird things that I wanted to highlight from this passage is the way God is already a RELATIONSHIP. In other words, already, before you and I have been talking, the Creator of the Cosmos has been dancing around with the Crucified and Risen Jesus—and the Spirit that pervades all things, from the beginning of time, has been ADVOCATING for us. And the reason that's so important is that we can be difficult. We can be hard to love. In the film (based upon the novella, *A River Runs Through It*) there are two brothers, Norman and Paul, who grow up in a rural Montana town, going to church and learning to fly-fish.

It's a beautiful story, describing how they love the rivers, the mountains and the people around them. But it's a tragic story in that one of the brothers, Paul, becomes addicted to gambling and doesn't seem willing to get help or to receive help; he just spirals down until he's eventually killed in a back-alley. And so, here's the word that comes to Paul's father, who is also a Presbyterian minister: "We can love completely without complete understanding."

2. Scott to Joshua: My guess is—you've probably had a few 'disconnected' experiences with family and friends and folks you've worked with. As you think about following Jesus—and trying to love them—what's been the hardest thing you've had to work through or let go of?

[Joshua responds... and asks Scott a question...]

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me and I in you."

The word "***orphaned***" here, in verse 18, suggests that Jesus is identifying himself like a mother or a father—like parents who are going to make arrangements for when they're no longer around. And what's so intriguing is that the Spirit will fill that void by prompting us, by summoning us to love and be loved in very unusual situations. By contrast, the world—the world of egocentric transactions and the what's in this for me?—won't get this. Last year, the Vice-President of the United States of America wanted to set the record straight about love; and as a newly converted Catholic, his advice went like this:

“You love your family, and then you love your neighbor, and then you love your community, and then you love your fellow citizens in your own country. And then after that, you can focus and prioritize the rest of the world.”

In response, Pope Francis offered this breathless reproof: *“Christian love is not a concentric expansion of interests that little by little extend to other persons and groups...”* On the contrary, the love of God that won’t leave us orphaned is the love of the people God puts right in front of us. It’s a commandment to love, not out of self-interest, but because it’s the truth of who we are.

Thomas Merton once described a mystical experience:

“In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation... And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.”

You see, there’s something overwhelming and even mystical about the love. And we’re never orphaned because the Spirit is always advocating for the lovability of the person whose right in front of us. John 14:21:

“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

3. Scott to Joshua: So here’s the thing I want to ask you and you can feel free to pass, but have you ever had a moment like the one that Merton describes? And if so, can you describe the circumstances in which you seemed to feel that love overwhelm you? If not, do you think you’d like to have such a moment?

[Joshua responds... and asks Scott a question]

Guess you had to be there: “I in you and you in me”—

Amen.