

**Sermon Notes from the Church’s Ministry Among Jewish People**  
Fifth Sunday of Easter – Year B

**RCL Readings** – Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; I John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

**ACNA Readings** – Acts 8:26-40 or Deuteronomy 4:32-40; Psalm 66:1-11; I John 3:(11-17)18-24; John 14:15-21

**Seasonal Introduction.** Eastertide, the season of Easter, is always 50 days long. It follows the pattern of the Jewish calendar with 50 days from Passover to *Shavuot* or Pentecost. During these days we remember the last weeks of Jesus on earth after His resurrection. Easter is all about the resurrection! This season’s traditional greetings of “He is risen!” and “He is risen indeed!” can bring hope and light to our broken world. “Because I live, you also will live.”

**Common Theme.** We will see in our readings that faith is not something passive. Instead, active faith in the life of the believer produces loving behaviour that has been termed “bearing fruit.” The metaphor of bearing fruit is used quite often in the Bible. Bearing fruit in the life of a believer is an identifying characteristic of a follower of Jesus.

**Hebraic Context.** Israel is compared to a vine or a collection of vines in a vineyard several times in the Hebrew Scriptures. Notably in the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7 and the Psalms such as 80:8-15. Hosea also describes Israel as a luxuriant grapevine sending runners in every direction, indicating that the vine is quite fruitful and producing a bountiful crop. This concept of fruitfulness is not new to the people of Israel.

Isaiah 5 and Psalm 80 is clear that there is work to be done in order for fruitfulness to occur. God has done much of that work. But Isaiah 5:2 and John 15 are also clear that there is work the vine, branches and grapes are to do to produce good fruit. The Wisdom of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) relates wisdom with the fruit of the vine, satisfying all who come to it. If there is nothing satisfactory about the fruit then surely the work put into it was in vain.<sup>1</sup>

Physically, God’s desire for the world to be fruitful is also shown from the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures. We see that, since creation, man was instructed to be fruitful, not only in their own numerical growth to fill the earth but also in promoting growth and fruitfulness of the natural world in which man found himself. Adam was instructed to tend the original Garden of Eden. God had planted a beautiful garden and did not want it to become overgrown or fade away. Instead, He wanted Adam’s participation in helping the garden to be fruitful and flourish.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Moses, in Deuteronomy 32:28-38, recognized that fruit comes from the vine that provides nourishment to it. Sometimes, unfortunately, the vine is not God. The fruit that came from Sodom, for instance, was poisonous. Good fruit comes from a good vine and bad fruit comes from a bad vine—if fruit is bad, what vine is it attached to?

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the Garden of Eden *גן עדן* is thought of only being a heavenly paradise and not a real location, or, if it was real, a small garden designed for two. However, the text implies it was a physical place in need of human attendance. The Garden was never meant to be static; it was supposed to grow and expand under the loving care of Adam, Eve, and their descendants.

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**Acts 8:26-40.** Believers (and unbelievers) can hear the Word of the Lord through many different means. We can hear God speaking and instructing us through His Scriptures. Some will hear Him through His Spirit; others through angels, dreams, or visions, while others will hear the calling of God through the words of fellow believers. The Lord is not bound to one form or another in communicating to people.<sup>3</sup>

In this passage of Acts, Philip (who had been chosen along with Stephen as one of the seven who would assist the apostles and distribute charity amongst the community in Jerusalem) received a command through an angel of the Lord.<sup>4</sup> Philip obeyed and so encountered the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip is instructed to go south towards Gaza, he is not told he would encounter the Ethiopian. Obedience to God is done even if it doesn't make sense at the time. It is also done in its entirety and not one action at a time.<sup>5</sup>

Traditionally, Ethiopia had a relationship with Israel, both historical and sacred, through the state visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon.<sup>6</sup> From the text in Acts, we see that Ethiopia not only shared diplomatic relations with Jerusalem but that some Ethiopians also shared the faith of Israel. The Ethiopian eunuch held a high rank in the court of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.<sup>7</sup> He shared the Jewish faith and worshipped the living God, although Acts does not define him as either Jewish, a proselyte or a gentile God-fearer. Perhaps he had timed his state visit with the Passover and Pentecost festivals, in which case he would have been curious as to the recent Jerusalem events. He was also wealthy enough to own a personal copy of the Isaiah scroll.<sup>8</sup>

The Ethiopian was reading a section of Isaiah 53 but, when approached by Philip, confessed confusion as to its interpretation. Philip took the opportunity not only to explain this particular

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<sup>3</sup> What is consistent about God's communication is that He works with and through people and He works through His history—the actions that show the faithfulness of God.

<sup>4</sup> The Philip mentioned here is known as Philip the evangelist, as he is called in Acts 21:8-9, and he is not to be confused with Philip the apostle. The apostle called Philip featured prominently in the Gospels but little is recorded of him post resurrection. Tradition and Hagiography have the apostle preaching the good news in Asia Minor. Philip the evangelist, meanwhile, worked in Samaria and Caesarea Maritima alongside his four daughters.

<sup>5</sup> Philip could have obeyed God literally and gone to the Gaza road. He did not yet have the instructions to engage with the Ethiopian. Phillip went beyond the literal instructions of God in being obedient and understood his calling to preach the gospel to whomever he met.

<sup>6</sup> According to this tradition, the Queen of Sheba came and saw the splendour and wisdom of Solomon and returned with teachers and priests of the Jewish faith. They also shared a son together named Menelik who began the Solomonic Dynasty of Ethiopia that only ended with Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Candace appears to be a Latinized name for the title held by the queen of Nubia or Ethiopia, Kandake.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Isaiah 56:4-5 declares a blessing for eunuchs who love God and the Sabbath. This passage from Isaiah may be the background to God sending Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch.

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passage, but declared Jesus to be the Messiah from the Scriptures. The eunuch, upon seeing water, requested to be baptized—he seemed quite familiar with the Jewish system of baptism and the mikveh.<sup>9</sup> Philip's obedience immediately bore fruit. But as Philip was transported to Azotus (Ashdod) he didn't stop being obedient just because God didn't give him specific instruction, he continued to preach wherever he went. Meanwhile, without Philip doing anything more, the message of the gospel travelled south.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church identified Simeon Bachos as the Ethiopian Jew who brought the faith of Jesus to Ethiopia.<sup>10</sup> The book of Acts is sacred history and largely contains the story of how the gospel went West. It does not tell us of how the gospel went North or East to India. With the Eunuch there is the hint of how the message of Jesus travelled South, even beyond Alexandria and North Africa.

**Psalm 22:25-31.**<sup>11</sup> Psalm 22 begins with the well known personal cry of anguish and suffering “My God my God why have you forsaken me?” The opening cry is personal from someone who has a deep relationship with God, but later the psalmist moves to include worship and praise that is more than personal, it is worldwide.

Verse 25 reflects the personal praise of David to the Lord which he will do in public in the “great congregation”. By verse 27 the praise and worship has been extended to the “ends of the earth” and “all the families of the Gentiles”. David, who is king of Israel in Jerusalem, knows that the good news of God will not be restricted to his people alone. The promise of God to Abraham will be fulfilled as all the nations of the world will be blessed. How this will happen David does not explain here in the Psalm, but he knows this will occur in the future to people as yet unborn.<sup>12</sup>

The pain and suffering experienced at the beginning of Psalm 22 is intensely personal. And yet others have felt the same pain and called out to God.<sup>13</sup> The salvation and subsequent praise is

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<sup>9</sup> Early manuscripts do not include Acts 8:37, the confession of belief, and so many modern versions also omit it, leaving it as a footnote. The verse does appear to be quoted as early as the 2nd century and is found in early Latin translations, including the Vulgate.

<sup>10</sup> Saint Irenaeus also identified him as Simeon Bachos. The Eunuch is also sometimes thought to be the Simeon found in Acts 13:1.

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 22 is composed by David for the overseer (חַנּוּכָּהּ), often translated as chief musician. Exactly who this person is remains unclear. It could be one of the choir leaders (Asaph, Heman, or Jeduthun) or someone else. Some Jewish commentators take this to mean God Himself from the word נָצַח (*netzah*), perpetual. (Thus some of these songs, such as are found throughout Psalms and even Habakkuk 3:2-19, might be written as a direct prayer to the perpetual overseer). The opening sentence says the Psalm is set to a piece of music called “The Deer of the Dawn”, which is a tune completely unknown to us today.

<sup>12</sup> There may be a hint towards a resurrection in Psalm 22:29 as even those who would die would also worship even as those yet unborn.

<sup>13</sup> Jesus quoted from this Psalm on the Cross. But tradition also states that others, such as Queen Esther also called out to God and quoted this Psalm before confronting Haman. (Tractate Megillah 15b:7-9,

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also deeply personal but it should also be communal, bearing fruit that has an impact on the entire world.

**I John 4:7-21.** One of the primary characteristics in the life of the believer is love. Paul described it as the greatest characteristic along with faith and hope. John reminds us of this important aspect in the behaviour of a follower of Jesus: “anyone who does not love does not know God.”<sup>14</sup> The command to love is reciprocal, we are commanded to love because we have been loved, not to earn love but to maintain the loving relationship. The question then is what is love?

Love is not an emotion. It's not something you fall into by accident. Love is not something you feel only on Valentine's Day or when you feel warm and fuzzy after too much chocolate. Love is a choice, which is why it can be commanded. Moses says to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might” and also to “love your neighbour.” If love was an uncontrolled feeling or emotion then this command would make no sense.

In this Epistle, John commands us to love our brother and sister as a response to the love that God has for us. The Lord spoke clearly to Moses during the exodus and said; “You cannot see my face, for no man shall see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20). John reiterates this statement again here that “No one has seen God at any time”. And while that is certainly true, God can be seen in us. How? God abides in us when we practice the action of love, which was demonstrated by the Father who sent His Son. The pinnacle of God's love was the cross and Jesus' resurrection. Our response to the love of God is to bear fruit with yet more love. As John says, “This is how love is made complete among us.”

**John 15:1-8.** As referred to in the Hebraic Context the image of the vine was a familiar metaphor. Hence the background to this teaching of Jesus might be Isaiah 5:1-7, known as the Song of the Vineyard. In Isaiah 5, God is the gardener and Israel is the vineyard. In John 15, Jesus continues to use the metaphor of the Father as the gardener, the followers of Jesus as the vines in the vineyard but also includes Himself as the true root of the vine.

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Babylonian Talmud) In both cases, a great salvation went out—not only personally but throughout the world.

<sup>14</sup> I think it's worth repeating this statement, “Anyone who does not love does not know God.” On the day of judgment all will be gathered before the Throne of the Son of Man. Some will have shown love and some will not. There will be some who believe in God but did not show love, to these the Son of Man will say, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

We should examine ourselves and we should know if we abide in Him and we should encourage our beloved to do the same. One of the primary characteristics in the life of the believer is love, for without love we prove we aren't truly among God's disciples.

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The imagery of the vine with its strong messianic connotations, remained a powerful metaphor for the Jewish followers of Jesus such that it entered the Eucharistic prayers of the early church as recorded by the Didache: “First, as regards the cup, we thank you our Father for the holy vine of David your servant” (Didache 9:2).<sup>15</sup>

Grapevines were quite common in Mediterranean countries including Israel. The familiar image easily emphasized the dependent nature of the vine runners to the root stock of the plant. For vines to function, grow, and blossom with grapes they need to be constantly connected to the root-vine.

Jesus describes a mutual relationship between His followers and Himself. We abide in the Master and the Master abides in his servants. Abiding is not a one sided affair. It is this relationship that then produces good fruit and no other relationship can do so.

What then do we mean by ‘abiding in the Lord’? In 1 John 2:5-6 we read that “but whoever keeps His word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in Him: whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.” To abide in Christ does not denote some kind of passive or superficial acquaintance. Remember that abiding is two-way, we are called to abide with him but Jesus also abides in us (and we would hope that He does so not in a superficial way).<sup>16</sup>

In keeping with the familiar understanding of agriculture, vines separated from the root die! Jesus provides His disciples with a stark warning; “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered”. We should not diminish the significance of the metaphorical warning here. Separation from God will result in spiritual degradation, not in spiritual flourishing.

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<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 11:1 states that “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” This is fulfilled, as we read, in Revelation 5:5 and 22:16, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered...” for “I, Jesus... I am the root and the descendant of David.” We should be thankful indeed that the roots and branch did bear fruit.

<sup>16</sup> It is debated among commentators whether abiding is equated to or the same thing as ‘being saved’. This debate rests around verse 6 where the branches that do not abide in the vine are thrown away and burned. And take this to mean that those getting thrown away and burned have lost their salvation.

The Greek word for abide, μένω (*menó*), is generally used regarding a temporary arrangement both in the Gospels and the LXX. However, John does use the phrase several times to denote something greater. In John 2:17 states, “The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” John 8:35 says, “The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.” These may be the exceptions that prove the rule by demonstrating that what should be temporary can last forever.

Whichever side of the debate we fall on, what we can be assured of is that the temporary can last forever for those who see the fruit of God—obedience to God’s commandment, loving one another as Jesus has loved us.

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Spiritual flourishing brings honour and glory to the Father who, as the gardener, has not been aloof but pruning, blessing, and working hard in His vineyard. We do not display our faith in the Messiah by simply acknowledging his kingship, resurrection and salvation. It is when we bear the fruit of loving action that we prove to be Jesus' disciples.

**Hebraic Perspective.** In Jewish tradition, the Bible is considered to be divine language, where every utterance of the Lord is pure. The bits we find easy to understand and the bits that we don't are all equally the words of God and pure. This includes the Law, which Paul says is holy, just and good. And it includes passages that we might find uncomfortable, but our discomfort at difficult verses is not God's problem.

Too often people put words into God's mouth and claim He says things He did not. We should be very very careful about doing that. One thing God never said was that we don't need to keep His commandments. Instead what we actually hear in the Scriptures is Jesus saying; "If you love me, keep My commandments." What commandments are we talking about?

In many Protestant circles the notion of a commandment, other than love, quickly gets the charge of being legalistic. Although really it isn't! Legalism has nothing to do with keeping the commandments. What legalism actually looks like is picking and choosing which commandments to follow.<sup>17</sup> For if you actually kept all the commandments (which is impossible) all you could be accused of is of being a good person, an exceptional one at that.

In the Hebrew Bible there are many words to describe the commandments and instructions of God. In Genesis 26:5 the Lord was speaking to Isaac and told him that Abraham, his father, obeyed the voice of God. God would like Isaac to continue in that obedience. God says that Abraham kept four things: my charge מִשְׁמֶרֶת, my commandments מִצְוָה, my statutes הִקְהָה, and my laws תּוֹרָה. Somehow Abraham kept God's laws.<sup>18</sup> When Jesus said, "Keep My commandments" it also is in the plural form. It is not just one!<sup>19</sup> The deliberate use of 4 different

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<sup>17</sup> In Matthew 23:23 Jesus states, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." Jesus wanted the Pharisees to tithe their mint and dill and cumin. It was one way they could be generous to God (while the priests and Levites, who were provided for out of the bounty of the rest of Israel, would surely be delighted their food could be delicious). But He also wanted them to follow all the rest of the commandments. Giving 10% to God is good (although neither a commandment nor something to be proud of given all He has given us) but however much we give God, we cannot ignore giving to the poor. And if we give to the poor, we cannot ignore serving them.

<sup>18</sup> Commandments, statutes, and laws are all in the plural.

<sup>19</sup> For those who argue that "all you need is love", I would ask, "what is love?" Love the LORD your God, love your neighbour as yourself. But how? What does love look like and how do you practice it? Because you practice love—feeling love is not one of the commandments God gave us. The obvious answer from

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words to describe God’s instructions reflects the entirety of the teachings of the Lord. From the least to the greatest of the commandments.

Our model for living and breathing the commandments and putting them into practice is Jesus Himself. If someone asks: how can you, as a fallible human, possibly keep the commandments? Then the answer is: the same way Abraham did! By walking in faith and being obedient to the voice of the Lord. That doesn’t mean Abraham was perfect. Jesus knew we would need divine assistance and so He sent us the Holy Spirit. No follower of Jesus should be scared of the commandments—for His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Hebrews 5:9 eloquently summarizes that; “And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him”.

**ACNA Readings**

**Deuteronomy 4:32-40.**<sup>20</sup> As the people of Israel stood on the plains of Moab, on the advent of the conquest of Canaan, Moses asked them to consider the “days that are past”. The fledgling nation of Israel already had a unique sacred history different from any other people group. The Lord had performed signs and wonders in Egypt that He had not, nor would, do for any other nation. Moses reminded the people that they, out of all other nations, had heard the voice of God in the midst of the fire that guided them through the wilderness.

Why was Moses asking the people to recall the past? Because the past is undeniably special for human beings. History, especially sacred history, is important.<sup>21</sup> Before going into the future, Moses needed the people to recall the past and to know that they had a special place in the plans of God. The sacred history of Israel, preserved in oral stories and written Scripture, proved that God is real, powerful, and able to intervene for the sake of His people. He will do so again in the future *because* He has done so in the past.<sup>22</sup>

For Moses the past does not remain in the past, but speaks into the present, affecting outcomes and changing the behaviour of the Israelites. “Consider in your hearts” the past things and in response “You shall therefore keep His statues and His commandments” so that it may go well

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John, you practice what God commands. If you keep all of God’s commandments you will, by definition, be practicing a pure love.

<sup>20</sup> The book of Deuteronomy is the single longest monologue in the Scriptures, presented by Moses who, at the start of his career, complained to God that he could not speak well. Somewhere along the line Moses became quite erudite indeed!

<sup>21</sup> To a large extent people and nations define themselves through their history. The present is always made up of things that happened in the past. The present never appears in a vacuum.

<sup>22</sup> The work that God has done is often compared to the gods of wood and stone, who have done nothing in the past, do nothing in the present, and will do nothing in the future. Moses later compared God’s actions to the nations, and specifically Sodom, who could not produce any good fruit but instead produced only poison for those who walked faithfully according to her counsel.

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with you into the future. In light of what God has done for His people the response of obedience is perfectly logical. Obedience to God did not bring about the Exodus from Egypt, it simply is the right thing to do in relation to having received redemption.

**Psalm 66:1-11.**<sup>23</sup> The first half of the psalm is an invitation for all the peoples of the earth to praise the Lord.<sup>24</sup> The Psalm makes a declarative claim that “all the earth worships You” and invites all the earth to “come and see the works of God”. Psalm 66:6-11 suggests that the history of Israel is one of the signs for the nations. The events the Psalmist described, the sacred history God did for Israel in the past, would act as proof of God’s power to the gentiles in the future.<sup>25 26</sup>

**I John 3:11-24.** Not only are we made in the image of God, but one of the actions of the children of God is also to imitate God. As followers of Jesus, we are to love as Jesus has loved. In the Gospels, Jesus did not die to defend His faith nor to avoid falling into sin, but rather, He died as an act of divine love for the world. Love is not something that is simply felt in the emotional sense. Love is also demonstrated by action. John tells us to “not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (v. 18). In John’s epistle that means a love that is self-sacrificial and, in the extreme circumstance, a love unto death.<sup>27</sup>

In Hebrew, there is a phrase, *Kiddush HaShem*, which was used in antiquity of Jewish martyrs who died for their faith, notably against the Romans. *Kiddush HaShem* literally means ‘sanctification of the Name’ of God, or “hallowed be Thy name”. But what does that look like? For the martyrs, the ultimate question became: would they love God, preferring death instead of

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<sup>23</sup> Psalm 66 is also composed for the mysterious ‘Conductor’ לְמַנְצֵחַ without an attribution from a particular author. It is a thanksgiving psalm without us actually knowing the occasion of thanksgiving for which it was penned.

<sup>24</sup> Salvation in the Psalms is almost always universal, meaning it is offered to both Jews and Gentiles. In this particular Psalm, the word used for God in this psalm is Elohim אֱלֹהִים rather than the personal name for the Lord Yahweh יְהוָה. Elohim is a more general or universal word for God while Yahweh suggests the personal deity of the Israelite nation. (Although this is a generalization and both terms speak of God.)

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 66 states, “He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot.” In response, Rahab states in Joshua 2:10, “For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt.”

<sup>26</sup> During the Easter season, we can also remember the sacred history of God’s deeds with the death and resurrection of Jesus in Israel during the 1st Century occurred 2,000 years ago. And yet it remains a witness to the nations of the earth of God’s redeeming power. Seeing what God has done in the past can chastise us and bless us and cause us to wish to bless God, shouting for joy, praising, and worshipping Him—for God has not changed from the time He did those mighty deeds in history.

<sup>27</sup> The word love in Hebrew is אהבה *ahavah* and first appears in the Bible in Genesis 22:2 where God called Abram to sacrifice his son Isaac whom he loved. Thus love appears for the first time in the Scriptures in the context of sacrifice.



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committing sin—such as blasphemy through idolatry, adultery, or being forced to murder another.<sup>28</sup>

The passage opens by explaining that we know Jesus loved us through an action—His sacrificial death. Following His example as His disciples, we also should be prepared to sacrifice our lives for others.<sup>29</sup> We are not all called to pay the ultimate price, but we are all called to love. In I John 3:23 a single commandment is given, “Believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another.” This is not two separate commandments, but one. Obedience and belief are not strangers.

John reminds us that if we encounter a brother in need and we have the capability to meet that need and choose instead to neglect that brother, then we have done wrong and the love of God is not within us. We will know if we really do love God by how we are loving others. John calls it being ‘assured’ in our hearts. We know our own hearts by the actions of love we bear to each other. No one has to wait until the end to know if they have been saved or not, we can know it now with full confidence and assurance by looking at how we love our brothers and sisters in the Lord—assuming we do love the brethren.

**John 14:15-21.** In the midst of Jesus’ last evening before His death, He took the time to teach His disciples by words, symbols, and deeds. The disciples were not ready for Jesus’ departure, neither His death nor His ascension. Jesus showed humility and service by washing His

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<sup>28</sup> *Kiddush HaShem* originally did not seem to refer to martyrdom. God commanded Israel “You shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you,…” How would Israel follow God’s command? As a representative people of God to each other and the world, they should do precisely what God desired—they should be obedient in love, humility and justice. God’s command, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain…” is often seen in the same light. (As a Christian, I profane—or take in vain—the name Christ before the entire world if I act in opposition to Jesus.)

But through time, as Jewish men, women, and children were confronted with a choice between disobedience to God or death, by choosing death they sanctified the name of the LORD and did not profane it before their murderers. The fullness of the term referring to the martyrs developed after the destruction of the Temple and the Sanhedrin’s time in Yavneh according to S. Safrai in *קידוש השם בתורתם של התנאים*.

<sup>29</sup> The focus is on a sacrificial love for the brethren, those people who are firstly members of the household of faith. Jesus also teaches us to love our enemies but we should be prepared to die for our fellow children of God, our brothers and sisters.

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disciples feet.<sup>30</sup> In John 14:15, Jesus once more reminded His disciples of one of the most important teachings of God, love of God and obedience must go hand-in-hand.

Loving God is intricately linked to our behaviour. Jesus connected the love we have for Him to our obedience to Him. “If you love Me, keep My commandments”. Initially, it might seem like a daunting task to follow the commandments of God, perhaps even humanly impossible! Jesus promises us help from the “Advocate .. the Spirit of truth”.

As the night continued, Jesus would tell the disciples three times of the Advocate.<sup>31</sup> The disciples would always need God's presence—and God always wants to dwell with His people. This Counselor, Comforter, or Helper (depending on translation) is not an esoteric new-age theory of universal love and kindness that transcends all religions but is the actual presence of the Holy Spirit, a part of the Godhead.<sup>32</sup> That's powerful! Later, Jesus would tell His disciples it would be for their benefit that He would leave them—for the Holy Spirit would only come in this manner after His departure. And the Advocate who comes would remain permanently, this is not some temporary fix from heaven.

Jesus then predicts His departure, but also that He will come again to His disciples. The relationship that the disciples have with Jesus will continue past death, it will not end at the cross. As followers of Jesus we have a shared life with the Lord—“Because I live, you also will live.” The resurrection leads to a deep mutual relationship involving Jesus, the Father, the Spirit, and ourselves. As Jesus declares, “On that day you will realize that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” We must remember though that the resurrection, an event occurring in the past, also changes our behaviour in the forms of love and obedience in the present. As Jesus also says in the next verse, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me.”

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<sup>30</sup> Washing of the hands and feet was traditionally done by the slaves or servants of the household, not by the Master. During the Passover dinner there was a time for washing during the order of service, today called the *Hagaddah*. While eating, Jesus' disciples were arguing who would be the greatest—not knowing that they would face trials they would fail the next day, nor the even greater trials in the years to come. Jesus deliberately demonstrated something remarkable to His disciples. Something He shouldn't have been doing, which probably explains Peter's initial outburst that ‘You shall never wash my feet’.

<sup>31</sup> John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7

<sup>32</sup> The Greek word is παράκλητος *paraklētos* which can refer to an intercessor or, in a legal term, for someone who pleads your case before a judge or in its widest sense to mean an assistant of sorts.