

Sixth Sunday of Easter – 2026

Acts 17:16-31

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

I'm reading a book by C.S. Lewis. It's called *Perelandra*. I've read it before, but you know what happens to your memory when you're north of sixty. I honestly don't know how it's going to turn out. The protagonist is a space traveler named Dr. Ransom, and he finds himself on Venus, which in the book is named Perelandra. Dr. Ransom meets a woman, a green humanoid, who is a theological stand-in for Eve. Clearly, she is without sin. She is regal, confident, unspoiled by fear or selfishness or competing allegiances. She is entirely faithful to her Creator. She is the first and only female on the planet. This divine creature is simply called "Lady", and she is Queen to the King, who I've yet to meet. She is innocent. Her life is lived in joyful alignment with her Creator's will. The reason that I tell you all this is for one simple line in the book.

It's a planet of moving islands. The "Fixed Land" is unusual, different. Lady has been told that she must not spend the night on the Fixed Land. It is a curious commandment, but there you have it. She may visit the Fixed Land by day but must not spend the night there. Lady and Ransom are investigating the Fixed Land, and she gives voice to this commandment. And then the author describes Lady as she thinks through what defying her Creator's will would mean – and that's where I want to put us. Lady shudders. It is a distressing notion (to defy her Creator), an idea that puts her ill at ease. To act contrary to her nature, to betray her Creator, to forge a breach between herself and life, she is horrified at the thought. To be content on the moving islands is a form of trust. The shudder is a form of deep, instinctive resistance against breaking the commandment. I want that.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). That, brothers and sisters, is a statement of fact. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). That too is a statement of fact and it provides insight into the love that is the catalyst for all love. God's Word does not return empty but accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent (Isaiah 55). So too God's love does not return empty. God's love transforms us (Ezekiel 36:26). Baptism regenerates us (Titus 3:5). Sinners become saints. Those who were dead in trespasses and sins become alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5). It's only the dead who are resurrected (Deuteronomy 32:39). It's only sinners who are forgiven, recreated (2 Corinthians 5:17). All of the baptized have been crucified with Christ and we no longer live, but Christ lives in us. The life we live in the body we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself up for us (Galatians 2:20). None of this is theological conjecture. These are statements of fact. Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. That love has had its way with us.

Christian love is expressed. Christian love is expressed in our desire to keep, to hold, to treasure and to embody Christ's commandments. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:14). The Lord was emphatic. The matter is not up for debate, or sophisticated interpretation or faithless dismissal. It's not easy – keeping His commandments. Most Holy God is not a God who asks nothing of you. Character, behavior, and devotion – you have been recreated by God's love and your character, your behavior, and your devotion is to be obvious to

others, lived out in the open, giving off the fragrance of the resurrection (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). It's not effortless. You will be spiritually challenged, tempted to take the easy road, assaulted by enemies of the cross. Satan assaults believers with doubt, he tempts believers with spiritual laziness, and prompts you to prioritize self, prompts you to find reasons for not obeying the Lord. Christ's commandments are shelved, forgotten, memory holed. And then where? And then where will you find yourself? Spending the night on the Fixed Land?

Let's chart the path of your beauty, your transformation, shall we? Let's chart the path of your love. Every one of you is beautiful. Every one of you is full of love, but let's chart the path, the events that brought you to where you are now. The first lady of our realm loved God above all things and loved her neighbor as herself. That priceless mother of all the living reached out her hand and defied her Creator. She ate that which she was commanded not to eat. Adam too, he ate, he fell, he brought calamity to this creation. Sin; it is not a minor blemish. Sin corrupts to a radical degree. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature (Romans 7:18). I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5). Murder, lust and greed are in our hearts. Blackened unto death, sin corrupts every part of us. We have an inherited claim to death and we have sent that claim skyrocketing by our behavior. We forget the unfortunate. We fail to forgive. We fail to serve when given ample opportunity. Not a pretty picture. We are Boris Karloff. We are Elvira Gulch. We are Nurse Ratched.

Our sinful nature has no intention of keeping Christ's commandments. When you were love's enemy, when you were love's antithesis, the Author of Love gave Himself to you (Romans 5:8). Unrestrained and pure, God has given His eternal love to you (1 John 4:10). For you, God was made man (John 1:14). That is love. For you, the Lord of all creation took on the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). That is love. For you, the eternal Son of God lived under the law, obedient, humble and true (Galatians 4:5). That is love. For you, the holy Messianic King became horrific with our sin (2 Corinthians 5:11). Jesus took it all. Out of love for fallen man, Jesus was slain on a cross. God punished sin in the ugly embodiment of sin, a man hanging on a cross. In the most marvelous sense, this man, who is truly God, was beautiful as He died, twisted and torn and pierced and bleeding. Love was unleashed as Jesus gave Himself to save you from sin and death. And you, by His sacrifice, have been made beautiful. His blood washed you. You are beautiful. His holiness animates your soul. You are beautiful. Grace invigorates your heart, your mind. You are beautiful. Love was awakened. And now that love strives to keep His commandments. Love shudders at the thought of breaking Christ's commandments.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. That is a statement of fact. Jesus is not offering a potential spiritual truth only for super believers. It's you; it's me, it's His church. You've been transformed. Humanity was a guttersnipe and now we have a love that blesses others, a love that gives without thought of repayment, a love that genuinely strives to do what pleases our Father.

Eliza Doolittle was a guttersnipe. Eliza is the unforgettable character from *My Fair Lady*. She was a commoner who butchered the gift of language. She was slovenly and artless. Her attire was rags. Her manners were an affront to human dignity. It's not a commentary on poverty but a commentary on treating heavenly gifts with contempt. Eliza, in the course of the movie, is transformed. At the climax of the movie, every eye follows her. She is regal, confident, and

naturally self-giving. *That* is Christ's church. All of us have been elevated. A new nature; you have a new nature. Love is awakened and that love aspires to keep Christ's commandments. Love your enemies (Matthew 5:44). Do good to those who hate you (Luke 6:27). Do this in remembrance of Me (Luke 22:19). Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me (Matthew 16:24). Seek ye first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). Be eager to take the lowest place (Luke 14:10). Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and render unto God what is God's (Matthew 22:21). Stay ready for My return (Matthew 24:42). Pray diligently (Luke 18:1). Be merciful just as your heavenly Father is merciful (Luke 6:36). If you love me, you will keep my commandments. His love invades this holy assembly. He brings His redeeming triumph to you through the Word and the Sacraments. You participate in His death and resurrection. Love is alive. The risen Christ ministers to you tenderly and His love is in you. Because He lives, you will live. The Spirit of Truth is in us and that too makes us beautiful. We are in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ). That is why love is alive among us. His love is having its way with us. That is His work. That is to His glory. We are supremely blessed.