

"...Clap Your Hands" (21May17)
Acts17:22-31; John14:15-21

It strikes me that we've got an interesting pairing today. In our Gospel reading, Jesus says, "if you love me," and talks about recognizing him. But that sits alongside the reading from Acts that's about people worshiping some unknown God.

On the one hand, it would seem hard to love something you didn't know. Like (in a somewhat smaller way) if you'd never tried rhubarb cobbler, could you say you'd recognize it, much less in any possible way that you loved it?

On the other hand, it also seems like if you *do* know you love something, it shapes things for you. If you love rhubarb cobbler, you'll want to bake it. You'll look forward to rhubarb season. You'll want to share it with others. You'll choose it over other desserts (or at least in addition to other desserts).

Along with knowing and loving and that shaping our actions, since we're celebrating our children today and they're leading us in worship, rather than a typical sermon, I figured we could do this more in the style of a children's message. So I've got a song for you, and we can keep adding stanzas to it. You might know this tune, but we'll do it with new words from Jesus:

If you love me and you know it, clap your hands. If you love me and you know it, clap your hands. If you love me and you know it, well, your faith will surely show it. If you love me and you know it, clap your hands.

That verse, besides being close to the original song, might make us say that loving Jesus is a reason for celebration. We clap our hands and rejoice because this is good news. Knowing Jesus and loving Jesus is worth cheering. In fact, it's not just us; the prophet

Isaiah said that even the trees of the field clap their hands (55:12)!

If our hands are in on the action, let's use another old verse to add our feet. After all, our faith clearly means we put a foot down. When things are unloving and against God's good will, when meanness or injustice seems to be taking control, we have to stomp it out. So let's sing: *If you love me and you know it, stomp your feet...*

I'm going to ask for your suggestions in just a minute after a couple more I've got ready. How about this one: make a cross? A great Bible verse declares, "We love because God first loved us" (1John4:19) and the cross is our go-to place for witnessing that, that Jesus took on our sorrows and sufferings and confronted injustice and even was willing to die because of loving us. Our Gospel reading talks about Jesus going away into death. But the cross also marks that death does not win, that God's love in resurrection wins. The cross says a lot about God's love for us, and that prompts our love. So we can sing: *If you love me and you know it, make a cross...*

The people in Athens in our reading from Acts weren't recognizing or knowing who God was, but Paul pointed out the beautiful things about creation and told them God made the whole world around us. So it seems that some of loving God is paying attention to and taking delight in this wonderful world God made. For that, maybe we sing: *If you love me and you know it, look around...*

What other verses should we add?

[suggestions included:

...show your heart...

...welcome all...

...make a friend...

...work for peace...

...come along...

Our reading from Acts is pretty serious about learning and what we reflect on, which is a great message for the end of the Sunday School year, a year spent searching for God and finding that God is very near to us. So let's sing about our pondering and thinking: *If you love me and you know it, use your brain...*

That using your brain is tough to fit into a song. Maybe you'll need to spend some more time in families or conversations or just remembering for yourself what you learned about God this year.

Almost to conclude, I want to go back to the stunning Gospel reading. It's one of those that can seem like a tongue-twister but is saying something so astonishing: it says Jesus shows us God, and even when we don't have Jesus with us, still the Holy Spirit is, and even if we feel like we can't see the Holy Spirit, still she's with you, and you are living with the life of Jesus which all leads to the remarkable thing that you can see God because you see each other. Wowie! For that, let's sing: *If you love me and you know it, you'll see God...*

A closing verse to seal the deal and proclaim our confidence that it's just as Jesus says: *If you love me and you know it, shout "Amen!"...*