May 14, Easter 6a (*John 14:15-21)*

We need more than a simple "I love you." So does Jesus.

by [Jared E. Alcántara](#) in the [May 2023](#) issue

I know a couple that follows a different pattern from many others. When one says, "I love you," the other does not say, "I love you too." Instead, the response is "Why?" or in some instances, "What are your reasons?" The practice might seem strange to some of us, but this couple seems to enjoy it. The ritual breaks them out of standard formulas, forces them to think about what they are saying while they are saying it, and challenges them to make the "why" of their love more concrete. The assurance that comes with being loved, with knowing that there are reasons for it—demonstrations of it—has the power to breathe new life into a person. It can sustain and uplift in times of uncertainty.

Jesus knows how we are wired, that we need more than a simple "I love you too" from him. When he tells us he loves us, we ask for concreteness. We want reasons. Demonstrations. With Philip, we say, "If you show us the Father, we will be satisfied" (John 14:8). We do not ask for more because we are faithless; we ask because we are human. More helps us feel secure and stable in moments of anxiety and fear.

If he wanted to, Jesus could take exception to our insistence on more. He has already given us so much. He would have a strong case. Yet, as our pastor, Jesus knows that this is not what we need most. A different approach is needed. In the first half of John 14, Jesus calls us to have faith, to believe in God and to believe in him. We struggle with trust, but we need it more than we realize. Then, in the second half of John 14, Jesus tells us how much we are loved.

Jesus shows us his love—he concretizes it. In the midst of our anxiety and worry that he won't be there for us, that we will be left all alone, we hear word that an Advocate is coming. Some translate this as *Helper* or *Comforter*, and, yes, the Spirit brings comfort and help. But the idea here is different: one is coming who is an advocate of your cause, a defender of your case, a legal friend that stands in

solidarity with you. The Advocate defends you, stands by you, makes a case for you before others. Not just now but forever.

Jesus also says that "in a little while" the world will no longer see him, but that his disciples will. Because he lives, so also they will live, an allusion to the resurrection life that will come to him on Easter and that will come to all those who follow him because of Easter.

I'm from New Jersey, so I hear Jesus saying: *You want reasons? I got your reasons right here!* You want me to show you? OK, I'll show you. How about an Advocate who will be with you always? How about an empty tomb that announces across time that not even death can stop the plans and purposes of God? How about now? Are you satisfied?

As Christians, we hold fast to an untamable Spirit, to a crucified and resurrected God who tells us and shows us we are loved. God gives us reasons to love. Even so, Jesus still calls forth a response from us. Deep relationships are built on reciprocity. A new friend will tell you what you want to hear. A best friend will tell you what you need to hear.

We say, "Lord, you know that I love you," and Jesus claps back, "I want more than a simple 'I love you too.'" What about the reasons, the need to make love concrete? It is no coincidence that, in a passage in which Jesus makes audacious promises to us, he also includes a call at the beginning and the end. At the beginning: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Near the end: "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me."

The gospel is both an announcement and a call, not just one or the other. Discipleship without grace turns us into self-righteous legalists. Grace without discipleship transforms us into detached observers. Only grace and discipleship together can make us whole. Jesus knows that we need more than a simple "I love you too."

An admirer stands in awe and appreciation. A disciple follows in love and obedience. *So you say you love me too? Show me.*