

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity, November 16, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 21, 226:3-4, 453, 278, 47.

Lessons: Isaiah 66:15-24, Acts 10:34-44, Matthew 3:13-17.

Sermon Text: 1 John 5:6-13.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Doesn't every human sometimes have the question "How can I know this is true?" Sometimes people have the question "How can anybody be sure of anything about God?" John, writing by inspiration of God, anticipates that question as he draws this letter to a close.

Satan and his anti-Christian false teachers take delight in exploiting our tendency to doubt. So John here writes on the subject of testimony, that is, testifying to what it is that you can believe.

The Lord himself long ago had established for the Israelites, his chosen people, a procedure for testifying to the truth. That procedure was to find two or three objective witnesses to swear to an event. Jesus himself used that procedure as he established his claim as the Savior before a skeptical crowd of Jews: *"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favor."* (John 5:31) He uses John the Baptist as his witness, and then also his heavenly Father, whose voice was heard at the time of his anointing, that is, his baptism in the Jordan River.

John now gives witnesses to the fact that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, the very Son of God, the Messiah. He first says there are two unshakable witnesses to Christ's divine nature, the water and the blood, and then he adds a third – the Holy Spirit. In a moment we will talk about these witnesses.

But before we continue, we need to remember why John is writing. *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."* This is not just John's opinion. This letter was written in order to give eternal life! So today, as we draw toward the last of our sermons on First John, we are assured that

THERE IS TESTIMONY THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE SON OF GOD

1. ***"There are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."***
2. **God's testimony is greater than man's testimony.**
3. **Believers know that they have eternal life,**
4. **But those who reject Jesus are doomed eternally.**

As a Christian, you have what matters, what is really important – you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God! That changes everything. You can be sure – sure that God loves you, has your name written in his book of life, has sent angels to keep watch over you, and has promised you eternal life. How does the song go which you learned as a child? "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

John here shows that the foundation of our faith is absolutely firm and certain, since it rests upon the powerful testimony of God Himself.

At the beginning of our text John talks about witnesses, testimony that Jesus Christ is who he said he is. ***"This is the one who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."***

This is a somewhat puzzling section of Holy Scripture. Although a number of interpretations have been suggested, here's one that makes sense. Jesus was baptized with water. That was the beginning of his ministry on earth. Jesus completed his work with blood.

The words water and blood then refer to the beginning and ending of Jesus' public ministry. There were false teachers in John's day, too, who denied the two natures of Christ – both God and man – claiming such false ideas as that the "Christ" from heaven simply came down and rested on the man Jesus during his teaching ministry. They were more interested in Jesus as a teacher of morality than as the actual sacrifice of God's Son for the sins of the world.

John's reference to water, then, would be to Jesus' baptism, his anointing as our Prophet, Priest, and King in the Jordan River. At the Jordan, the Father's voice came from heaven identifying Jesus as his beloved Son. He accepted the baptism intended for sinners and in this way declared his willingness to make full satisfaction for the sins of the world. The reference to blood would be to the crucifixion, where the words of Jesus and the signs and wonders that occurred at his death convinced even a Roman military officer and those with him who executed Jesus: ***"Surely he was the Son of God!"*** (Matthew 27:54).

If you are reading a King James Version of the Bible, you may notice that verse 7 is much longer in the KJV. The New International Version mentions it only as a footnote. That extra sentence does not belong in the sacred text. It crept into the Vulgate, the Latin Bible, and from there into some of the early English translations like the KJV in 1611 A.D. But there are no Greek manuscripts with that sentence. All modern translations leave it out.

And so these are three witnesses to Jesus Christ, to his person, his mission, his completion of his work. The three agree. Water, and blood, and the Holy Spirit, who, after all, recorded the Holy Scriptures for our learning and eternal salvation. The Holy Spirit speaks the truth and ***"the Spirit is the truth."***

The Father and the Holy Spirit are in agreement. This is not at all like the pagan gods of mythology who fought among themselves and sort of carved up the territories where they claimed power. For example, if humans were on the sea, then one pagan god would have power over them. If they were on dry land, then other pagan gods would have power and must be honored there.

The Spirit even testifies in writing, the written Scriptures. They aren't just man-made documents put together from opinions of other writers or drawn out of the creative minds of the writers themselves. This is why the Holy Scriptures are so consistent from Genesis through Revelation. The Bible does not contradict itself, though to our human minds it may sometimes seem so.

Of these facts the Spirit of God in the Gospel bears witness, testifying again and again that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. That is the special work of the Holy Ghost, to testify regarding the truth, to teach the truth, since he himself is the Truth, the eternally faithful God. Thus the testimony of the Spirit glorifies Christ in the hearts of the believers.

Now about that testimony. John writes ***"We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."***

In earthly matters, we can accept the testimony of a human being, ***"but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son."*** If we believe the witness of men, be assured that the witness of God is greater.

The Gospel is the testimony of God himself concerning the salvation which was earned by his Son Jesus Christ. It tells us about the fact of Christ's baptism and of the shedding of his blood in his great suffering and death. The Holy Ghost, true God, gives us evidence in the Word of God that cannot be disproved that Christ redeemed all men from sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Faith is essentially the acceptance and application of this fact. Anyone who does not believe in God has made God out to be a liar, because he has not believed in the witness of God himself concerning his Son.

Everyone who believes in the Son of God has the trust, the conviction, and the confidence that Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Son of God and the Savior of the world, and that this salvation applies to the believer himself. The Holy Spirit, who lives in the heart of the believer, assures him of this fact.

The unbelievers, on the other hand, are not only foolish, but also blasphemous, even calling God a liar, because in refusing to believe the testimony of God in the Gospel concerning his Son and redemption through his blood, they declare God to be a liar by treating his testimony as unworthy of belief.

John gives a summary of God's witness: And this is the witness; that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. That is the testimony of the Gospel. That is the wonderful news which we find on every page of John's letter. That is the message which all the apostles proclaimed, that God has given us eternal life, and that this life is a free gift of his grace and mercy. For there is nothing in us that should deserve such a reward. The only reason why God has given it, why he is holding it out to all men, is his divine love in Christ Jesus. It is in his Son that we have this eternal life, if we place our entire trust in him, if we rely on his perfect atonement in our life and in our death.

John also adds: ***“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”*** If you have the son, you have life. What more do you need?

We Christians, having received the message of salvation through the Word and the Sacraments, place our trust in Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, our Redeemer. Word and sacrament build and nurture faith. Without Word and sacrament, faith dies.

Eternal life is ours. We won't see the completion of that gift of eternal life until it begins for all believers on judgment day, but God's Word makes it clear here that there is no doubt that it is ours. John has written at some length describing how good it is to be in Christ.

The testimony of the Gospel is too certain, too definite to allow doubt. Anyone who foolishly rejects the Son of God also rejects eternal life and deliberately chooses everlasting death and damnation. The unbeliever has only himself to blame if he is given over to that which he himself preferred.

The Father did not sacrifice his Son 'just for the fun of it.' He made that supreme sacrifice in order to spare people the torment that Satan is going to suffer. Paul says that we are by nature children of God's wrath. Unless people are reborn in Christ, they stay children of wrath. And unless people are reborn in Christ, they stay that way forever.

Isaiah says (chapter 66) that the flames of hell are never quenched, that the maggots of human decay never die, that the damned are loathsome to the rest of mankind. Jesus said that what awaits those who reject him is outer darkness, weeping and grinding of teeth. In Revelation (20:10) John says that hell is like a lake of burning sulfur, where Satan and his helpers will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

This is why John writes so earnestly. This is why we need to listen to him. This is why your family's spiritual well-being is worth your greatest energy. This is a life or death issue for every person on the planet.

Thank you. Lord, for the assurance of eternal life! Lord, give those of us who are confident of your salvation the confidence to witness to others, to testify that God's witnesses of love are true! Amen.