

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fourth Sunday after Trinity, July 13, 2014

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

Hymns: 380, 367:2, 371, 220, 198:1-4.

Lessons: Leviticus 4:13-21, Romans 3:19-28, John 13:31-35.

Sermon Text: 1 John 2:1-2.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This has to be one of the most outstanding passages in the Bible. But because it is tucked away in one of the smaller books near the end of the Bible, it doesn't always stand out for everyone to see and remember. John 3:16 is sometimes called the gospel in a nutshell, but this passage should rank right up there as a marvelous summary of what God has done to save sinful mankind.

These are words of comfort and forgiveness, lest someone despair of their sins, as Luther reminds us in his explanation to the sixth petition: "we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins; and though we are tempted by them, we pray that we may overcome and win the victory."

The Word of God today assures us that

JESUS CHRIST ATONED FOR SIN

1. **God's goal is that his children do not sin.**
2. **But because we all sin daily and much, God sent an advocate for us, "*Jesus Christ the Righteous One.*"**
3. **"*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*"**

John addresses his hearers as children. This is John's favorite form of address, that of an affectionate father to children whom he tenderly loves. This is also the address which Jesus himself used on at least one occasion.

The greeting "*My dear children*", "*My little children*" (King James Version) should make an impression on us. We expect that parents will love their children. Jesus loved his followers as if they were his own children.

God's goal is that his children do not sin. In fact, this is what God demands of everyone. But no one is sinless.

John says 'my little children I am writing this to you that you may not sin.' This reminds believers of the necessity of showing their new spiritual nature in resisting sin. He has already told them that their fellowship with Christ and God is something which separates, which sets them apart from the unbelieving world. He has given them the blessed comfort that God forgives sins and he reinforces that idea here. The result must be, of course, that Christians fight against sin and that they do not permit sin to rule them and that they refuse to be willing servants of sin. Paul writes to the Romans: "*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.*" (Romans 6:12-14)

But everyone sins. No one is ever free of sin in their earthly life.

Despite all that a believer tries to do, he and she must admit that sin clings to us, and threatens to drag us down into despair and other great and shameful sins.

We acknowledge that truth daily in our prayers and our confession of sins to God. We acknowledge that fact when we confess to others that we have sinned against them. So we must recognize that sin is the normal, natural condition for all mankind, and no believer is completely free from sin until he leaves this world. But we see here also the idea that if someone falls into sin and feels that it is too great for God to forgive, there is also forgiveness for that sin. Judas Iscariot was sorry for his sin of betraying Jesus Christ, but he did not have faith in the forgiveness of sins. This passage encourages us to have faith in the fact that Jesus can forgive any sin. This is a statement with a world of comfort: ***"But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."***

If some one does sin, if, in spite of all his vigilance, if it happens that he stumbles and falls, then it is not God's will that he should remain in this condition and despair. He should instead remember that Jesus Christ, who, although he was also tempted just as we are, is absolutely righteous and just, without a single sin, stain, or blemish. It is Jesus who also fulfilled the Law of God perfectly in our stead. He is our Advocate, our Intercessor with the Father. He died for our offenses: ***"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."*** (Romans 4:25)

We also read in Romans ***"Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."*** (Romans 8:34)

The New International Version tells us of ***"one who speaks to the Father in our defense."*** The King James Version uses the phrase ***"an advocate with the Father."*** The word John uses for "advocate" is used only by him in the Scriptures. It is used in John's gospel 4 times, quoting Jesus. It is translated in 4 of the 5 places John uses it as "comforter". The word literally means "one who is called to one's side", one who is called to help, either as a counselor who teaches and admonishes, or as an advocate who pleads one's case with another person. The first time it is used is when Jesus says ***"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;"*** (John 14:16) Jesus there is speaking of another comforter, someone besides himself. That comforter, of course, is the Holy Ghost, as we read a few verses later: ***"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."*** (John 14:26)

In our sermon text Jesus himself is identified as the comforter, the advocate, the ***"one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."***

We have an advocate before God. We think of someone such as a lawyer, or a public defender, but one appointed by God, not by a human judge. It implies a court of law and more. It especially denotes any friend called upon to give help, either by pleading or giving evidence, or by virtue of his position and power.

Jesus is the righteous one. He is the sinless Son of God. God doesn't have to make or declare Jesus good and righteous. He is righteous. And remember, God takes his righteousness and imputes it to us, to all mankind, covering us with Jesus' blood and righteousness. This is called objective justification, in which God justifies all mankind, that is, declares all mankind holy and righteous because of what his Son Jesus Christ did.

John explains precisely who he is talking about as a comforter. John can point to Jesus' perfect atonement, which has been earned for all men and is imputed to men. Jesus can truly be the champion of our cause, because He ***"is the atoning sacrifice"***, the propitiation for our sins. Our Advocate does not plead that we are innocent, or try to blame someone else, or claim that there are extenuating circumstances which cause our sinfulness. He does not make excuses for our sin. He acknowledges our guilt and presents his vicarious work as the basis for our acquittal. He suffered the full penalty for the sins of the whole world. He himself is the propitiation. Now there is a word we don't use much. Propitiation. We should be very familiar with Jesus as the propitiation for our sins, and the New International Version properly translates it as "atoning sacrifice". Propitiation refers to the idea of conciliating or appeasing an offended power, and has even been used outside of Scripture in reference to pagan religions with the idea of propitiating the gods with a sacrifice.

This teaching of objective justification that ***"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world"*** is the heart and core of the Gospel message. It teaches that God,

of his own pure grace and mercy, sacrificed his own Son, Jesus Christ, in order to pronounce the world not guilty. It is the message that the Son willingly offered up his life as an atoning sacrifice, that is, as a personal blood payment to reconcile two enemies – God and the human race – and make them "at one" again. (Do you see the English word "atonement"?) This gift of God's mercy is an objective fact, that is, it comes purely and totally from the goodness of God, entirely without any human worth or effort. It is also universal – God pronounced it on the whole world: all mankind who will ever live. God declares us "not guilty"!

The atoning sacrifice of Christ, given "***while we were still sinners***" (Romans 5:8), is an unshakable rock of comfort, a done deal, a fact that Satan and hell cannot erase.

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son!" (John 3:16) Notice the subject of that sentence – God! Notice the direct object – the world! Our salvation occurred on God's initiative, with the Son's crucifixion, and was sealed and guaranteed forever with the Father's unshakable verdict.

Of course, we know that Scripture teaches that this objective justification is made ours only through faith. ***"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."*** (Mark 16:16 King James Version) It is only the believer who is saved, who actually benefits from God's objective justification, by making this his own by faith, and that we call subjective justification. And of course, faith itself is a gift from God!

Jesus Christ is both our High Priest and the Sacrifice he made for our sins. That one point cannot be emphasized too often or too strongly, namely, that the redemption of Christ was made for the whole world, for every single person who ever lived or is living today, that it is there without our merit and even without our faith. Faith, which in itself is a gift of God through the Word of God, is only the hand which accepts the salvation as it is offered for all men. That is the great art of faith, to cling to Christ in the midst of temptation and sin, knowing that his satisfaction covers every conceivable case and was not confined to any individual case or class of people. You can confess Jesus Christ is my Advocate, my Intercessor, my Redeemer.

Jesus Christ suffered and died for the sins of all mankind. This was after he had lived a perfect life. He has been made the atoning sacrifice for our sins and for all men, too. Note carefully that John says this is ***"also for the sins of the whole world."***

Could there be any greater words of comfort for sin-sick sinners?

Peter tells us that we ***"are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."*** (1 Peter 2:9) But remember how it is that we are chosen, holy, special. ***"Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.... is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."***

The very real flesh-and-blood death of the Son of God is the atoning sacrifice necessary to make satisfaction for all our sins. I can't do it myself. No matter what you may hear at some funerals about how good the person who died was, the Word of God is clear that ***"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** (Romans 3:23)

It is because of what God did for us through his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ that we are declared righteous.

If you are going to memorize just one bible passage this week, let it be this one: ***"But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*** Thanks be to God for this fact! Amen.