

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Eighth Sunday after Trinity, August 10, 2014

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

Hymns: 472, 659, 444, 391, 291.

Lessons: Isaiah 11:1-9, Ephesians 6:10-18, John 17:1-10.

Sermon Text: 1 John 2: 12-14.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

So far in this letter, John has written a lot of words which sternly warn against sins especially against our fellow confessors of Christ.

In these verses, John presents something a little different. These verses are displayed as poetry in the New International Version and they are actually words of praise for Christians.

John speaks of “children” 15 times in his three short letters. Calling people “children” often implies a lot of growing up to do. The word “children” is also used here to show the intimate relationship between those who read and hear this letter and John himself, but more importantly between Christians and their heavenly Father. John writes that they have known the Father; they have learned to believe that he is their Father for the sake of Christ and they are united with him by the fellowship of faith. And of course we must remember Galatians 3:26: ***“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”***

Note that John does not write to “pastors” or “elders” or use any of the other words used in the New Testament for those called to lead churches. He is addressing those who especially in our times are the heads of households, or the leaders of what have been called “house churches”, that is, churches meeting in the homes of believers. Remember that even Martin Luther put the responsibility on the heads of households to teach Bible truths to their families.

Everyone John addresses has received blessings from God. Some, however, have different or greater responsibilities.

We can always learn from what someone tells someone else. Please listen carefully as

JOHN HERE ADDRESSES “CHILDREN”, “FATHERS” AND “YOUNG MEN”

1. ***“Your sins have been forgiven on account of [Jesus’] name.”***
2. ***You have known the true God.***
3. ***You are strong and have overcome the evil one.***
4. ***“The Word of God lives in you.”***

Having admonished believers in many verses of this letter up till now, John here goes on to praise God’s believing children. He is here affirming God’s blessings.

John addresses “children” and “fathers” and “young men” each twice. First he writes ***“dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.”*** Then he writes to the fathers who ***“have known him who is from the beginning,”*** that is, they have known God from the beginning of the Gospel being preached to them. Then he writes to the young Christian men who have ***“have overcome the evil one,”*** that is, Satan, the devil. Then he again addresses his hearers as children who ***“have known the Father.”*** Then he repeats what he said to fathers. And finally, he writes to the ***“young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”***

John also says to us ‘I am writing to you because your sins have been forgiven you for his name's sake.’ It is the affectionate tone of the spiritual father addressing those who were united with him in the fellowship of

Christian love. His appeal rests upon their having been made partakers of God's most wonderful gift, the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ's name. It is because Christ obtained a perfect satisfaction for the sins of all mankind; it is because he took upon himself both their guilt and their penalty and reconciled God to the whole world, that we are united with the Father in that wonderful union which makes it self-evident that we should walk in the ways of his will.

The word children really identifies all Christians. As a very old man, the last of the living apostles of Jesus, John speaks to them as their father. As an apostle, John has been commissioned to help take care of the believers who were created for fellowship "***with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.***" (1:3) Because John represents a generation that will soon pass away, this most senior of fathers thinks all the more naturally of those entrusted to his care as his "children".

He starts by talking about the forgiveness of sins. Remember, the forgiveness of sins is the greatest gift God can give.

The entire Christian life rests on the unconditional pardon that Christ has bought for us, that is, the forgiveness of sins. John focuses first on the essential idea of the forgiveness of sins as the common possession of all who believe in Jesus as Savior. Listen to how his hearers are greatly blessed. He wrote earlier in this letter "***But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.***" (1 John 1:7-9) A few verses later he also wrote "***My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. 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.***" (1 John 2:1-2)

John's "little children" are God's children whose sins have been forgiven. John wrote about this great blessing in his Gospel when Jesus had told his apostles "***If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.***" (John 20:23)

The forgiveness of sins is really the heart of all the other gifts of God. We learn about Jesus Christ to realize and comprehend what he has done for us. We learn that fact, that truth, from the Word of God, which, in essence, is from Jesus Christ himself.

After reminding his hearers that their sins are forgiven, he goes on to talk about having known God. "***I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning.***" He addresses fathers as those whose responsibility for the children is like that of John himself.

This is something that we who are older sometimes take for granted. We have heard ideas from the Word of God so often that we sometimes forget that many people have not heard them or remembered them as firmly as we do. That is why we must continually be remembering and teaching the Word of God and our own history as congregations and as a church body. There is always the danger that "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it."

What does it mean to know God? Well, listen to what Jesus himself said, as John recorded in his Gospel: "***Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.***" (John 17:3)

This kind of knowledge is a thorough knowledge of God, not just a passing knowledge of being able to recognize someone on the street. The believer knows God because the Word of God lives in you. And remember, Jesus Christ is called and is "the Word".

John writes to the fathers, to the older Christians, because they have learned to know and to put their trust in him who was from the beginning, namely, God the heavenly Father and the eternal Son of God, because their faith rests in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

And it isn't enough just to "know" a fact, such as the truth that "Jesus died for my sins." One must believe that fact in order for it to do him any good at all. After all, the Word of God says "***Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.***" (Mark 16:16)

One must believe that Jesus Christ died for his sins, all of them, to receive the eternal life that the forgiveness of his sins earns for him.

In these difficult times as we approach the end of the world, Christian fathers must fulfill their Christian responsibilities. And so for the sake of each house church and its corresponding community of households, John calls the fathers to action.

"I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one." Alongside the fathers, John addresses also the young men because they have or soon will have responsibility in the daily life and care of households, and of the community of the visible church. The old men, the "fathers" cannot lead the church forever. The young men must take reins of leadership under Christ's calling. Even in earthly situations young men are more vigorous and can do more of the "heavy lifting". This is especially obvious when our churches have volunteer work days to maintain our property.

And to these young Christian men, John writes that 'you have overcome the Wicked One.' They have renounced and overcome the Evil One, the devil, with all his temptations to evil. Though the battle is still continuing, the believers always have the advantage over the wiles and tricks of Satan. With God's armor and weapons, they are able successfully to fight the evil one every day. After all, in our confirmation vows we promise to remain faithful to God with the help of God and by the grace of God.

In this world there are many moments in which the evil enemy may seem to have the advantage, and even seems victorious. But because our heavenly defender, Christ, is victorious, Christians, too, shall be victorious. He assured his disciples before his suffering "**I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.**" (John 16:33)

John repeats and emphasizes this idea: "**I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.**"

You are strong. Not "might be". Are. The Lord has provided powerful weapons to all his soldiers. We are not powerless before the evil one. We have the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith. We have the power of prayer and the protection of all God's angels.

John writes later in this letter: "**You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.**" (1 John 4:4)

And the younger men, whose victorious fight against the devil the apostle has just mentioned, are never to lose sight of the fact that their strength is not from themselves, but is imparted to them by the Word of God. It is through the Gospel that the Holy Ghost gives us the power to withstand all the attacks of the devil and to remain victorious unto the end. Thus St. John reminds us of the blessings which we enjoy in our position in life as Christians, of the glory which is ours in this relationship to God, in order to work and confirm in us the unwavering resolution to be true to Christ and not let anyone take our crown.

In spite of what false teachers had been telling the people about the inadequacy of the Bible as a source of revelation and strength, John says that they are very much alive. They have the Word, which can guide them and help them think. They have the Word which reveals God to them, corrects what is wrong, gives hope, and inspires love.

We must all go on fighting until we win the battle and receive the crown of victory. Turn to God and rely on him so as not to be killed in battle. And what is our weapon? Our greatest weapon is named by John: "**the word of God lives in you.**" And we have this certain promise from God: "**be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.**" (Revelation 2:10)

As we strive, with God's help, to remain faithful, John will give us some very appropriate admonition in our next sermon: "**Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.**" (1 John 2:15-17)

May we show in our lives every day that the Word of God lives in us! Amen.