

EASTER II – APRIL 24, 2022 – 1 JOHN 5:4-10

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

<sup>4</sup>For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith. <sup>5</sup>Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? <sup>6</sup>This is he who came by water and blood-- Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. <sup>7</sup>For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup>the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. <sup>9</sup>If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. <sup>10</sup>Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.

“Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying.” Hymn #597 in LSB, written by Rev. Stephen Starke; music by Jeffrey Biersch. This is a hymn that we often use in the church upon the occasion of a Baptism during the worship service; we’re thankful that it’s been written, albeit only a few years ago. The newly baptized, usually a young infant, is blessed with the washing away of their sin, and the gift of saving faith in Jesus Christ as their one and only Savior, in the blessed flood waters of Baptism. If we look at the stanzas of this hymn, they speak of what happens in this glorious gift from our heavenly Father has bestowed upon us in His church. Because of Christ coming and dying and rising again, and the faith we’re given in this once-for-all act upon the cross, we are given eternal life. Along the way, we’re reminded about our sins being buried in a watery grave, when we are drowned and die; a beautiful

phrase is in the second half of stanza 2, when it speaks of “Christ the Ark of Life has ferried us across death’s raging flood.” What a moving picture – Jesus being the one that does the work of Baptism, and it’s all for the purpose of taking us from the valley of death to the mountain of life. A couple of other phrases that Starke uses that are priceless Lutheran hymn writing – “[Christ] spreads a table where He feeds us with His Body and His Blood,” and “Though around us death is seething, God, His two-edged sword unsheathing, By His Spirit life is breathing through the living, active Word.”

This is just another example of modern, contemporary hymnody that teaches the faith, through the turn of phrase that is easily remembered, yet deeply theological. Whether hymns are old, or new, if they’re written in accordance with the Lutheran confession, they’re invaluable to study and use within the church. There’s a difference between hymns that sound great, but are bereft of meaning and depth, and hymns that are packed with truth, yet relatively easy to sing. It’s true what Luther said many times, that when we sing hymns and the liturgy, we actually pray twice – once through the words, twice through hearing the words put to the tune. It’s simply easier to commit something to memory – ask young school children how they learn the days of the week, or the months of the year, and you’ll see that they often learn it when it’s put to song.

In the text for this morning’s consideration, from John’s first letter to the church, we see the theological underpinnings of this hymn brought to us full-force. The water, the blood, and the Spirit are united in calling us to faith, keeping us in the true faith, until we reach life everlasting. We can see that there is a unified plan to this on the part of our heavenly Father – He doesn’t want us to be sidetracked or led astray, but rather be kept steadfast in the one true faith unto life everlasting. (If you’re wondering where you’ve heard that phrase before, it’s part of the blessing that I give each table as part of the dismissal from the communion rail.) He doesn’t want us to be distracted to miracles that aren’t centered on Christ and His actions on the cross, nor to anything that originates with us. These things cannot save! The only salvation that we can find is through Christ and His cross, which are brought to us

here and now by the Word of God, which underpins the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In fact, if we are looking anywhere except where the Holy Spirit has told us to look for Him, we are engaged in a fruitless pursuit, and John even tells us that we are calling God a liar by disobeying Him. Let's talk about this a little bit, as we analyze this text, during the week after Easter, when Christ rose from the dead.

This Second Sunday of Easter is often known as "Doubting Thomas Sunday", because the Gospel reading for this day is from John 20:19-31, the episode where Thomas wouldn't believe that Christ was risen unless and until he was able to place his hands into the nail holes and his hand into Christ's side. We're familiar with this passage – even under the Three Year Lectionary, this text is used every year, so that we know it and learn it often. I think that one of the reasons that this text is so important for us is that Thomas is so much like we are – we need proof, we are immediately wired to doubt that which doesn't seem to make sense to us. It's natural to doubt, especially since we live in a world where everything else is proven; data rules supreme; things of faith are relegated to second place, hidden from "educated" society. "Seeing is believing" – we trust things that we can see, experience, test, rather than those things that we just have to take someone else's word on.

Jesus' words to Thomas, His beckoning summons to Thomas' weak and questioning faith, is reassuring to us. He was willing to do whatever was necessary to change Thomas from unbelieving to believing, from questioning to sure, from doubting to faithful. He comes to us, and gives us reassurance to our faith, even when the devil, the world, and our sinful nature try to get us to doubt and be unbelieving. That's what our text from 1 John 5 also speaks of – the testimonies that the Holy Spirit gives to us, that all agree – the water, the blood, and the Spirit

Interesting, isn't it, that Thomas wants to put his hand into the side of Jesus, the same place where water and blood flowed just a few short days earlier. I don't think it's too much of a stretch to make this connection between the gifts that John speaks of in his epistle, and the combination of all

three of these on the cross. Water and blood – proofs that He was really dead. I don't know much about the science of this, but it's really uncommon for the blood to separate within the blood vessels so soon after death. That's why, when the soldier pierced Jesus' side with the spear, he was so astonished that Jesus was already dead – after all, the other criminals that were crucified alongside Him had to have their legs broken in order to speed up their physical death. Normally it takes hours for the blood to separate into water, platelets and plasma – the fact that it took place so quickly was definitely surprising.

Spirit crying – remember Jesus' last words from the cross – “Father, into Your hands I commit my Spirit”? The Spirit of God, that unites the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, went out of Him, and He died, until the Third Day, when He was raised from the dead by God the Father. The same Holy Spirit that was present at creation, at Jesus' death, was also present at His resurrection and His ascension into heaven. This Holy Spirit underpins the Word of God, which is the testimony that we have, even today, of these things. The Word of God is what converts the heart, and is stronger than the bonds between joints and marrow, more sharp than a two-edged sword. The same place where water and blood came out of our Savior, also is where the source of the Lord's Supper and Baptism are – in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. That's how these three things are tied together.

He overcomes the world – through His resurrection, through His removal of sin from us, through His victory over sin, death and the devil – the signs that this is true are the same signs that everything else is true in the Bible – His Means of Grace. His Word – the Spirit's crying – is the most important tool for us to be saved, for us to be kept in the one true faith, and for us to be kept faithful until our life's end. The Holy Spirit authors saving faith – it's a gift from God. Many in the world around us try to point to our own decision as the starting point for faith. The only problem with this – we are DEAD in our trespasses and sins, and as we know, dead people can't do anything – they're DEAD! Rather, the Spirit comes to us through the Word, converts our hearts of stone toward faith in Jesus, and continues to

strengthen that faith through hearing and reading the Word of God throughout our earthly lives. How do we become familiar with the Word of God, so that we have it to draw upon when the storms of life come? The same way that one gets to Carnegie Hall – “practice, practice, practice.” The more we read the Word of God, the more we become familiar with it, and especially how it fits together. The Scripture is a unified whole, and it makes sense when we see it that way – one story of forgiveness, God’s action on behalf of His people. The Word of God is the only offensive weapon mentioned when Paul gives his listing of the armor of God – there are many defensive weapons that are to deflect the devil’s flaming arrows, but the only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

The Word is enough – it doesn’t need our help, our strengthening, our interpretation. When Luther tells us that one little word can fell the devil, that word is Jesus, Who embodies the Word of God encapsulate in the Scriptures. The Bible is an accessible book, one which we can understand, when given a little perspective. When we learn that it’s all about Jesus, and that everything points to Him, that’s a big push in the right direction. When we learn that it’s all about God’s work, and not our work, then we’re also directed into the right things. When we learn that the Scripture interprets itself, and that clear passages help to interpret less clear passages, we’re well on our way. Don’t be afraid to consult those who have gone before us in the faith – the Lutheran Confessions are 100% a faithful exposition of the Word of God, and by seeing how the church has dealt with falsity and error through the ages, we can apply these solutions to the similar debacles that we find ourselves faced with today. After all, there is nothing new under the sun, and sin just replicates itself over time – the same sins keep on rearing their ugly heads. As long as we’re consulting sources that we know are faithful, we can definitely not be afraid to draw upon church fathers from of old – realizing that they are fallible, to be sure, but that they have lots to bring to the discussion today.

The water – Baptismal renewal changes everything . We are marked as children of God, sealed with the cross of Christ, have our sins washed away, and have saving place instilled in us in place of the

rebellion that formerly lived in our hearts and souls. Isn't it interesting all the ways in which God uses water to cleanse, purify and bring new life to His children throughout Biblical history? Noah and the flood – those who believed in the promised Savior, Noah and his family, were saved; the rest of humanity was destroyed. It wasn't because Noah and his family were somehow better than anyone else, but because they had faith in the promised Messiah. Parting of the Red Sea – the children of Israel passed through on dry ground, and their Egyptian enemies drowned when the waters returned to their places. God makes a habit of being consistent, and He is here as well, using plain water to do such amazing things. The only thing that He adds to it to make it a special water is His Word, which we talked about before, as the most powerful thing in the entire universe – when He speaks, things happen.

The blood – not just the blood of Christ shed on the cross, but also the Blood of Christ, along with the Body of Christ, eaten and drunk for the forgiveness of sins, and the strengthening of our bodies and souls. It's amazing how God works – using such common, ordinary elements, combining them with His Word, and doing such amazing things with them. The fruits of Christ's sacrifice on the cross are brought to us, 2000 plus years later, through the Sacrament of the Altar. Because we have the flesh of God within us, we also have life in His Name. Because we partake of His sacramental meal, we have the blessings associated with Him reinterpreting the Passover in terms of Himself. What a wonderful reminder to us, that the Body and Blood are so crucial in understanding just what the Holy Spirit does, and how He does it – He works where He has promised to be, in His Word and His Sacraments. We don't have to cast about in the darkness, seeking Him out – He is where He has promised to be

When folks try to convince us that what the Holy Spirit testifies is the truth is too good to be true, we can take confidence and know that God never lies to us, never misleads us, but always is faithful. His testimony is true, and we can take it to the bank as if it's already happened, even though it's down the line on the timeline of history. That's what we call prophetic future tense when we're studying the Scriptures, by the way – even though it's in the future, we render it as present tense verbs,

because God never changes His mind, never tells us one thing and does another – it would be against His nature. Thanks be to God that He gives us His Word, His Baptism, and His Lord’s Supper – and that they are perfectly aligned toward testimony of the truth. He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Let us not forget this, in this season of Easter that keeps the celebration of Easter that lasts for 50 days until the Day of Pentecost, that His Word is truth, and that water, blood and Spirit join in testifying to the truth. The Holy Spirit will keep us from falling from faith, and keep us reassured and strong and steadfast in the one true faith until life everlasting. He has truly done everything for our salvation. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord.