

Second Sunday of Easter – April 8, 2018

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

1 John 5:1-6

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2) This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3) This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, 4) for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5) Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. 6) 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.

A NEW PERSON

Dear fellow children of God:

When a person is sick and hospitalized they often don't really feel like themselves. But after their surgery or treatments are over and their rehabilitation and recovery are completed they will often say, "I feel like a new person."

The spiritual ups and downs that we experience during Holy Week and Easter are a bit like that. On Maundy Thursday & Good Friday we observe the Lord Jesus as he carries the burden of our sins with him to the cross – it's a bit hard to feel like our joyful Christian selves after meditating on those thoughts. And then Easter comes with the blessed assurances that Christ's payment for our sin was complete. Christ lives and because he lives – we also live. And we are filled with joy once again.

Christ's Resurrection Assures us of a New Life

Once the Holy Spirit has called us to faith in Jesus as our living Lord and Savior we are able to enjoy this new life. John introduced this letter by reminding his readers that he was proclaiming a living Savior – Jesus Christ – to them so that they might have fellowship with him and with the Father and his Son. The Holy Spirit has used the writings of Scripture and the Sacraments to bring us into this blessed fellowship where we can enjoy the new life which Christ assured us with his resurrection from the dead. Now we have been born again of God. Now we obey his commands. Now we have overcome the world.

We're pretty familiar with before and after pictures. They're commonly used in advertising by companies that market personal improvement plans. The cosmetic and skin care companies love to show you pictures of their clients before they started using their products and then show you the change after the person has had a make over. Diet companies do the same thing – they show the clients before they have lost 30 lbs and after. Obviously the more striking the contrast the better the companies like it.

In order for us to understand the new life which is assured us by the resurrection of Christ we need to make a similar comparison. We need to compare a life without Christ and his resurrection with the life that we now enjoy through his grace.

John addresses us as individuals who are born of God by reminding us: **Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.** This is the after picture.

There is not a single individual who believes that Jesus is the Christ when they are born. Jesus reminds us that flesh gives birth to flesh. The psalmist put it this way: (Psalm 51:5) **Surely I was sinful at birth,**

sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Everyone is born sinful, totally corrupt and under the wrath of God. The Scriptures describe those who are born of the flesh as being hostile to God, with no ability or interest in following his law. Such individuals are spiritually blind and dead in their sins. They have no part of God and his blessings. They are under his curse. And they are powerless to change their situation.

Even now our sinful flesh still clings to us – reminding us of what we were – before we were called to faith. We think selfish thoughts, we think lustful thoughts, we think greedy thoughts, we have thoughts of revenge and sometimes we even act on those sinful thoughts. The apostle Paul reminds us: **sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned--** That's why Jesus became one of us – so he could take those sins upon himself and be punished for them. His resurrection offers us new hope and new life.

We have been born again of water and the Spirit – by God's grace we have been given the new life which Jesus won for us with his innocent sufferings, death and resurrection. Now things are different for us. We can see some of the differences because now we love God. John reminds us: **everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.**

Because we have been born again – we now love God. Those who love God will love his children as well. Real faith and real love go hand in hand together. Those who love God are willing to submit to God, to live according to his will, to follow his decrees; **this is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.**

That's not the way an unbeliever looks at things – but those who have been born of God – who have received new life through the Word and Sacrament are able to understand, desire and even live this way. Because we are still spiritually immature, our love for God and for each other is far from perfect. In fact at times we think that we can separate love for God and love for each other into separate categories but our text for today together with the rest of Scripture reminds us that this is not so. God's commands to us can be summarized in this way: (1 John 3:23) **to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.**

This living in love requires continual life-long growth – as we love God and his children we will be carrying out his commands as long as we continue to live as God's children. This life style would be impossible for the one who does not believe in Jesus – but for anyone who believes in Jesus it is our goal and desire. Now we obey his commands. **This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.**

Once again the before and after comparison can help us appreciate the new life that Christ's resurrection assures to us. People who are still of the world may complain that God's commands are too heavy to bear, that they take all the fun out of life – technically they are correct. God's law has the power to crush everyone. Those are still under his wrath will certainly feel that burden but by the grace of God you and I have been given a new life. John emphatically states that the Lord's commands are not a burden to those who have been equipped to handle them. Those who live by faith have been joined to Christ.

God has forgiven and removed the residual guilt of our past sins, changed our clothes from the filthy rags of sin to the robes of his righteousness, snapped sin's power to control us and implanted the Holy Spirit in us with a new mindset. God's goal in saving us from sin wasn't just to rescue us from hell – but to restore to us to his image – to turn us into a people who think and act like God.

Now God's commands become a delight for us to obey. The law of God is indeed bad news for unbelievers. But those who have faith in Christ are willing to take his yoke upon themselves. Do you know

what a yoke is? We often think of it as a labor saving device – two oxen are joined together to pull a heavy load. So who is it that pulls the load with the Christian? Well it's Jesus, of course. He daily assures us of forgiveness for all our failures each day. He provides the stamina and gives us strength for each day -- enabling us to delight in the law of the Lord. By God's grace, we see that God has given his commands to us as a blessing and that they really lead to lasting joy and happiness. Imagine how much more enjoyable life would be if everyone around us kept God's commands – think of the evil and the problems that would be absent from our lives! Wouldn't it be wonderful if we no longer had to put up with disrespect for authority, violence, adultery, stealing, bad-mouthing and evil desires.

God working in us is more powerful than the devil working in the world. Now we obey God. Now we have overcome the world. **For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5) Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.**

Everyone who is born of God has overcome the world. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God has overcome the world. What does it mean to overcome the world? One of our WELS pastors explained in a commentary on this section of God's word:

- It's rejoicing in the life, hope and forgiveness we have through Christ
- It's staying loyal to Jesus in spite of Satan's attacks
- It's resisting the devil knowing he will have to flee (because Jesus has defeated him)
- It's adopting God's value system instead of attractive human philosophies
- It's using and enjoying things without becoming materialistic
- It's enduring pain and hardship without despairing or becoming bitter
- It's rising from the dead to eternal life on judgment

Who is that enjoys these blessings? Look again at how our text answers that question. **Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.** Only those who confess with their hearts, lives and lips that Jesus defeated sin, the devil and the world are declared victors over the world. Whether a believer's faith in Christ is large or small is not the point that assures us this victory. The victory is assured because of who Christ is and what he has done for us. **He is the Son of God who provides us with the forgiveness of sins.** To have forgiveness is to have every blessing from God. It is impossible to overcome without Christ. Without faith in the Son of God, there is only failure and unending defeat. We are nothing without Christ.

The closing verse of our text reminds us that the life and death of Jesus are absolute proof of the forgiveness and eternal life that Jesus won for us. **6) This is the one who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood.**

This is no doubt the most difficult verse of this text – many explanations have been offered. Among those that seem to best fit the point that John is making is that the reference to Christ's coming by water and blood are references to the work that he did for us. Christ's baptism with water marked the beginning of his earthly ministry...his bloody crucifixion on Good Friday marked the conclusion of that ministry. On the day of his baptism the Father and the Spirit declared that Jesus was worthy to begin his ministry. The blood which he shed was accepted by the Father as the payment for the sins of the world. So we conclude that both Jesus life and death were vital to our salvation. His resurrection assures us of a new life. There is no need for us to doubt this because as the closing words of our text remind us -- **And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.**

The Spirit has used the Gospel in Word and Sacrament to give us new life. Now we are born of God. Now we obey his commands. Now we have overcome the world. Amen.