

"Tone Deaf"

Text: 1 John 4:4-11

Rejoice in the grace and mercy of your God, who has given you ears that actually hear. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

You and I were born tone-deaf.

Now, I would imagine that some of you who actually *can* sing might take exception to that statement. *"Speak for yourself, Pastor! Tone-deaf?"* Tone-deaf, after all, is typically used to describe monotones – those of us whose singing often sounds more like a braying mule than an angel. Technically it refers to someone who is "physically unable to distinguish between subtle changes in musical pitch" – thus the monotone.

This is obviously not the sort of tone-deaf we are talking about. This morning we are talking about the sort of tone-deaf that makes it impossible for human beings to hear *with comprehension and faith* the vast majority of truths that you and I take for granted. In fact, this sort of tone-deafness represents an ongoing worldwide tragedy.

This is our study topic thing morning, and the concept will be introduced by this morning's text, found in the Epistle of First John, the Fourth Chapter:

^{ESV} **1 John 4:4-11** *Little children, you are from God and have overcome the world, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.* ⁵ *They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.* ⁶ *We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.* ⁷ ¶ *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.* ⁸ *Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.* ⁹ *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.* ¹⁰ *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* ¹¹ *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

So far the very Word of God. God himself has given these words to you, and herein offers you wisdom, strength, comfort, and – in particular this morning – that Christian love that he values so highly. Since these are all

things we need and desire, to that end we pray, ***"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

There is, of course, a big difference between "heard of" and "heard." You've all probably *heard of* dog whistles, though no one here has actually *heard* one. The human ear (and/or brain) isn't capable of hearing such high frequencies. Same thing with those anti-rodent devices that supposedly emit a frequency that drives mice and rats nuts, but again is too high-pitched for man to hear.

There is another "sound" that man can't or doesn't hear that has nothing to do with pitch or volume. This sound has everything to do with the message itself, and with what man *wants* and *doesn't want* to hear. The message is Jesus Christ and him crucified. Again, almost everyone has "heard of" Jesus Christ. It continues to baffle Christians, however, that so many who have "heard of" Jesus Christ still have not "heard" him. They know *about* him, but they don't *know* him.

Our text put it this way: ***They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.*** ⁶ ***We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us.*** The Greek word translated here as ***"listens to"*** means simply *"hears."* In other words, what John is saying is that when people of the world talk to each other, they not only hear, they get it. They hear with understanding and comprehension. Yet when a Christian talks to the world a strange, disconcerting phenomenon kicks in: they hear, but they don't hear. That is, they hear the words we are speaking, they logically or reasonably process the words and their meanings, but they just don't get it. Hearing, they don't hear – they don't comprehend because it isn't a part of them. Paul once put it this way: ^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 2:14** ¶ ***The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*** In case you are missing the meaning here, listen again to an even clearer translation: ^{GWN} **1 Corinthians 2:14** ¶ ***A person who isn't spiritual doesn't accept the teachings of God's Spirit. He thinks they're nonsense. He can't understand them because a person must be spiritual to evaluate them.***

The vitally interesting and relevant fact here that we don't want to miss is that the problem the world has when it comes to the message and meaning of the gospel is not lack of attention. Nor is the problem a lack of intellect or imagination or good manners. The problem is that they

are, quite literally, spiritually tone deaf. They simply *cannot* make heads or tails out of what we are saying to them.

Again, this doesn't mean that they cannot process the words and their physical meaning. It isn't therefore as if they have no concept of what **"born of a virgin"** means, or **"died on a cross"** or **"rose from the dead."** They get that part, that much, but that's *all* that they get. They don't get the meaning, the import, the life-changing power or consequences of those words of truth.

It's difficult to find a parallel in the secular world, but we'll try. How many can recall what happened on *"the 18th of April in 75"*? Hopefully a few at least will recognize that as a line from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*. The "75" referred to 1775, and April 18th was the date Paul Revere rode to warn the *"country folk"* of the approaching British army.

Now imagine for just a moment that the colonists heard Revere's message, but it meant nothing to them. In that scenario they would know that the British army was advancing by boat, that they would be arriving shortly, and maybe even that that represented bad news - but that was it. They remained totally oblivious to the *import* or the *consequences* of that coming reality and promptly went back to bed. They just didn't get that the arrival of British Grenadiers meant something more than just a bit of detached news. It meant that bloodshed, destruction and death were imminent. It meant that many of their husbands, sons, and fathers would soon be lying dead, their lands devastated, their homes burned, and their storehouses emptied. It meant they would be forced to billet enemy soldiers, feeding and serving them. All of this would become reality – unless they took up arms to defend themselves.

That's the sort of thing John is talking about in our text, but only on a much more critical, eternal scale. Hearing, our world doesn't hear. Reminds me of a pastor who was trying to have a devotion with a sweet elderly lady in a nursing home. At one point he pointed out to her that *"Jesus was coming soon"* – whereupon she replied, *"Company! How nice. I'll have to bake some cookies."* The pastor doggedly tried to carry on, pointing out who Jesus was, what his coming meant, and how important the Savior was for all mankind. Her reply, *"Well then maybe I'd better bake a nice pie too."*

This illustrates the reality of all who exist in unbelief. Unlike that sweet old lady, who was hopefully just confused, unbelief is far worse than simple confusion. Unbelievers are often at the top of their game – the best and the brightest according to the world's reckoning. Many of them seem to

have it all. God sees it differently. In fact it's even worse than that. Not only to they have nothing, they have no desire to get what they need. It's foolishness in their eyes. It is nonsense that thoroughly repulses them – mythology that they positively despise and utterly reject.

All of which would make for an extremely gloomy and depressing message, but for one fact: you and I were once just as tone-deaf. Every single Christian, before he is brought to faith, holds the same low opinion of all things spiritual.

This is where the second part of our text comes in, introduced by John with these simple words: **"Beloved, let us love one another."** If you were alert and paying attention as those words were read, you may have noticed how abrupt and disconnected they seem at first glance. But we know that God the Holy Spirit doesn't do "disjointed." The fact is these two things (the spiritual "tone-deafness" of the Godless and our Savior-God's will that we love our neighbor) are intimately connected. Think of it in terms of these two bits of Scripture, the first is from Matthew 27:20-26, 39-40: ***Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.*** ²¹ ***The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."*** ²² ***Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!"*** ²³ ***And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"*** ²⁴ ¶ ***So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."*** ²⁵ ***And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"*** ²⁶ ***Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified... And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads*** ⁴⁰ ***and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."***

The second is from Acts 2:22ff: ***"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know--*** ²³ ***this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*** ²⁴ ***God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it...*** ³² ***This Jesus God raised up, and of that***

we all are witnesses...³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."³⁷ ¶ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Why are these two texts so important in the context of spiritual tone-deafness? Because the crowds were more or less the same in each reading. These were the residents of Jerusalem. When their religious leaders told them that Jesus was a fraud and deserved to die, they agreed and called for his crucifixion. At that point his claims were utter foolishness in their ears – as evidenced by the fact that they used his own words to mock and ridicule him while he hung on the cross: ***"You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."*** Yet to this same crowd Peter demonstrated the "love-in-action" advocated in our text.

And the results were utterly, eternally spectacular. Souls, once impossibly tone-deaf and on the path to hell, were carried into the light of truth and understanding by the power of God's Word. This same amazing transformation was accomplished in you and me through the power of that same Word. The message of our text then comes into sharp focus: The very fact that unbelievers are hopelessly trapped in their spiritual ignorance, and so despise the Word of truth, offers us the greatest opportunity to reflect the Savior's love in our lives and actions. Hear again the words of our text: ***In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.***

Take a good, hard, honest look into your heart. Your Savior doesn't want you to despise and abandon the Godless – any more than he despised and abandoned you. He wants you to love them, value them, and to share with them the live-giving power of the message of life. This gift has already

been given to you and me. God grant us hearts that love enough to share the same with our neighbor. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Acts 10:34-43** So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed:³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear,⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

ESV **John 15:9-17** As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.¹² ¶ "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Fifth Sunday after Easter – May 6, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn - 764 (Stanzas 1-3) *(Brown Hymnal)*

"God of Grace and God of Glory"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The Epistle Lesson: (Acts 10:34-43) What exciting days those must have been in the early Church when large numbers were brought to faith with one sermon. Our mission work today might not produce such numbers, yet we know that there is still rejoicing in heaven over even one sinner who repents and is brought to faith in Jesus Christ. Such things can only be accomplished when we love enough to share the gospel, as Peter demonstrates so well in this reading.

Psalm 66 (Supplement page 37) *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Gospel Lesson: (John 15:9-17) How hypocritical to say, "*I love the Lord!*" on Sunday, only to live with a heart full of hate the rest of the week. Christians struggle *daily* to live as our Lord wants us to live. The struggle, of course, is due to the old Adam that wars against the new man in the Christian. Thanks be to Jesus, who showed us the greatest measure of love by laying down His life for us. How that new man in us longs to be like our Savior.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 766 *(Brown Hymnal)*

"Sing with All the Saints in Glory"

The Sermon – Text: 1 John 4:4-11 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

"Tone Deaf"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -48 *(Red Hymnal)*

"How Blest Are They Who Hear God's Word"

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 764 (Stanza 4) *(Brown Hymnal)*

"God of Grace and God of Glory"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (37) Ave (41)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Pierre
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Fri-Mon	-10:00 a.m.	– Pastor out of town
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service (No Communion)
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Hanel is considering calls both to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI and Berea of Inver Grove Heights, MN. Teacher Ted Quade is considering the call to Faith of Markesan, WI. Teacher Paul Tiefel is considering the call to St. John's of Okabena, MN.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend a Dakota Area Study Conference in Pierre on Monday – leaving early and returning late. He is also scheduled to attend a family function in the Atlanta area, leaving Friday and returning Monday. There will therefore be no Adult Bible Class or communion next Sunday.

ILC Professor Nominations – ILC is now accepting nominations for a professor to replace Prof. Paul Schaller on the faculty of Immanuel College in Eau Claire. Please see Pastor Roehl for more information.

Communion Schedule – June 3 has been designated as our **Confirmation Sunday**. Holy Communion will therefore be offered here at St. Paul on May 20, June 3, and June 24. Beginning in July we will resume our regular 2nd and 4th Sunday schedule.

Delegate Housing – We are still short on housing for the upcoming West Central Delegate Conference. If you are unable to house Conference participants in your home, please consider providing a motel room.