

# "The Victory that Is Faith"

Text: 1 John 5:1-5

May you recognize and experience the love that God the Father has for each of you – shown nowhere more clearly than in the sacrifice of his Son for your sins. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

All that I can say is that the guy was creepy – deeply unsettling and I can't quite put my finger on just why. It made me uncomfortable just being around him. Oh he was very pleasant and I can't say that he was in any way threatening. I didn't worry that he was going to hurt me, I just found myself wanting to get away from him as fast as I could. I know I didn't want to hear anything that he had to say, mostly because I had a pretty good idea exactly what he *would* say. I've met guys like him before and they are pretty much all the same. They have strong opinions and are absolutely convinced that they are right. I could tell that he wanted to talk to me and that he was just looking for an opening to begin the conversation. I didn't give him the chance. I tried to radiate a good "leave me alone" vibe. Not sure if he got the message, but as soon as the elevator stopped on my floor and the door opened, I was out of there.

Now, here's the interesting part. Read the paragraph above again, but this time knowing that this is not me talking about an encounter with someone else. It is someone else talking about an encounter with me. Or you. What you've just heard is the retelling of an unbeliever's encounter with a Christian. It is therefore a clear, unguarded view into the thoughts and attitude of many of the godless that you yourself encounter every day. It serves as a look through an unbeliever's eyes and a revelation of just how most non-Christians view you.

Are you comfortable with the role you play in that scenario? Are you okay playing the role of what many in the world regard as the "kind of creepy guy"? Are you good with the idea that those who are of the world are most often - maybe *always* - uncomfortable around you, a Christian?

And here's an even more unsettling question. Do you, perhaps, find *yourself* equally uncomfortable around other Christians who are not members of our denomination?

These are the sorts of questions we will be examining this morning on the basis of our text. That text is found in the Epistle of First John, the Fifth Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 John 5:1-5** *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. <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?*

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 - love. 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.

One of the particular challenges of being a member of a conservative Christian congregation and synod such as ours is learning how to uphold the Fellowship Principle while still maintaining a love for *all* Christians and developing a healthy, Scriptural "us vs. them" worldview. This is indeed a tall order, especially for those who are well-trained continually to watch for error and to cut ourselves off from it wherever it is found. The temptation is always there to lump Christians who teach and believe falsely on a certain doctrine or doctrines with the godless – to lump Christians with unbelievers in our *us vs. them* worldview.

Know first of all this morning that this is neither fair nor right, and the Apostle John makes short work of the problem in the opening words of our text: **"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him."**

Stop and think about that verse for just a moment. When you honestly evaluate what John is writing here by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the rather obvious conclusion that most of us would have to draw is that Christians of other denominations often tend to do a better job at this than we do.

The challenge, of course, is to do the one without leaving the other undone. In other words, the hard part is remaining very jealous for the purity of *all of* God's Word while still possessing and demonstrating a

love for Christians who teach and believe wrongly on one or several topics.

On some level we seem to get this – we seem to sense that we ought to have and exhibit love for *all* Christians, even those with whom we cannot, because of false teaching, join in acts of fellowship. But there is a center here, a Biblically identified sweet spot, that we find difficult to occupy.

This problem is, of course, not new. Remember how young Joshua wanted Moses to silence the two men in the Jewish camp who did not go out to meet the Lord as ordered but who nonetheless prophesied in the camp. We read the account in Numbers 11:26-29: ***Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp.*** <sup>27</sup> ***And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."*** <sup>28</sup> ***And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them."*** Do you remember Moses' response: ***Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"***

The same sort of thing happened centuries later when Jesus himself walked the earth. In Mark 9:38-40 we read: ***John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."*** In fact this was the same John who, decades later, wrote the words of our text. He needed to learn a lesson, and Jesus was more than willing to teach it: ***But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me."*** <sup>40</sup> ***For the one who is not against us is for us."***

Given the words of our text, John obviously learned the lesson. But he just as obviously learned the balance that was necessary if he was to do the one without abandoning the other. Not only does the Apostle tell us that we are supposed to love all who ***"have been born of God,"*** he balances that in 1 John 4:1 with: ***"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."*** Again in his Gospel John spoke of the importance of clinging to every single Word of God when he quoted the Savior: ***"I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness."*** <sup>47</sup> ***If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world."*** <sup>48</sup> ***The one who rejects me and does***

***not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.*** <sup>49</sup> ***For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment--what to say and what to speak.*** <sup>50</sup> ***And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."*** John 12:46-50

John clearly promotes a balanced both/and approach. We are to separate from error (for light can have nothing to do with darkness) but we are also to love all Christians and to recognize them as part of the "body of Christ." In our us-them mentality, all Christians are part of the "us." We struggle for the right balance here by demonstrating not only an aversion to the darkness of false teaching and unbelief but also a love for all who are, in fact, fellow-Christians in God's eyes – those who are in fellowship with us and those who are not.

Love, you will recall, isn't really about emotion so much as it is about selfless, outward-directed actions. A big part of the way we are to show love to fellow Christians who are erring is to help them to identify the darkness of sin and unbelief. It is certainly *not* to make them comfortable with error.

Again, difficult balancing act. Not at all an easy task. We seem to have a hard time loving that which is not one with us in all that we teach and believe. It's a challenge to remain true to God's Word, and still adopt the right sort of "us-them" mentality. In our text, John identified the "them," didn't he? ***"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world."*** The "world" is the "them"; that is, the world of unbelievers all around us. It is – and should be – disturbing in the extreme when we find ourselves more drawn to and comfortable with the godless of this world than we do with other Christians.

John then moves next in our text from loving fellow Christians to loving God: ***By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.*** <sup>3</sup> ***For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.***

Today is Mother's Day. Anyone here going to show their love to mom by tracking mud through the house? How about by being an ungrateful slob or treating her badly? Obviously not. We show our love by doing something that will give mom joy, right? Compare that to what John tells us in our text about loving God. How do we demonstrate our love to God? Obviously not by doing what displeases him. We show our

love by doing what we know pleases him, which John in our text identifies as **"keeping his commandments."**

The good news here, as John also points out, is that God's commandments are not burdensome. It's always nice to be able to show your appreciation or affection for a loved one by doing something that you both enjoy. The good news is that the same situation exists between us and our God. Since the change brought about in every Christian by his conversion, we too can honestly agree that keeping God's commandments is the absolute joy of the new man that he has created within us. It is anything now but burdensome or oppressive.

Our text finally gets to that which forms the theme for our study this morning: *the Victory that Is Saving Faith*. You heard it in the words of our text: **And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.** John then goes on to ask the obvious question: **Who is it that overcomes the world?** His answer: **"the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."**

Faith in Jesus Christ is then the dividing line between "us" and "them," isn't it? It always has been and always will be. The reason ought to be obvious: everyone who believes in Jesus Christ will spend eternity in the same place. That's "us." Everyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ will also spend eternity together, but in a much different place. That's "them." The part of this that ought rightly to fill us with joy, relief, and comfort? Through the faith created in each of us by God himself, we have forgiveness for all our sins and will spend an eternity with our God in heaven. We are, in other words, now and forever on the winning side.

That same good news also serves as our marching orders, our life's work, because our calling is not to hate the "them." Our calling is to show love to "them" by doing everything in our power to make them part of the "us." Simple law and gospel are our tools in this life's work. Nothing else works, nothing else has the power to change someone's heart, and therefore also his side – to turn a living soul from "them" to "us."

God grant us joy in who and what we are, and the courage and love for the battle ahead. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 10:34-48** So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. <sup>36</sup> As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), <sup>37</sup> you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> 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, <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>43</sup> To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." <sup>44</sup> ¶ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. <sup>46</sup> For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, <sup>47</sup> "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" <sup>48</sup> And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 15:9-17** As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. <sup>12</sup> ¶ "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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 10, 2015**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 14 (Red Hymnal)

"All People that On Earth do Dwell"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 22ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

**The First Lesson:** (Acts 10:34-48) One again we see 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.

**The Second 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 Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 16 (Red Hymnal)

"Blessed Jesus at Thy Word"

## The Sermon – Text: 1 John 5:1-5 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"The Victory that Is Faith"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn - 307 (Red Hymnal)

"Draw Nigh and Take the Body of the Lord"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

## The Distribution -Hymn 306- (Red Hymnal)

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn - 644 (Red Hymnal)

"Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

**Attendance** - Sunday (55) Average (50)

## This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee time
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service

**CLC News** – Pastor Paul Krause is considering the call to Trinity of Watertown, SD. Seminary student Raju Bhitrakoti was allowed to graduate three weeks early from our ILC Seminary in Eau Claire to return to his native Nepal. There he will begin his kingdom work, helping also with the recovery effort. We wish him God's richest blessings.

**Voters' Meeting Notes** – Phil Pfennig was accepted into voting membership. Application was also received from Travis Hill. \$500 in emergency aid was designated for the MDF Nepal relief effort. Voters determined to pay down our current mortgage by \$10,000. The Council was also directed to investigate paying off our current Special Assessment bill as an alternative, if that would prove more financially advantageous. A Greeter Program will be implemented at St Paul – details to follow. Two lay-delegates are still needed for WCDC. Please see President Mike McEnroe for full meeting minutes.

**Spokesman Subscriptions** – Lutheran Spokesman subscriptions are up for renewal. See the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table. The Spokesman is now offering free one year subscriptions. See the Pastor.