

The Second Sunday of Easter

1 John 5:4-10: "Is Jesus Really the Son of God?"

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In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank You, that of Your indescribable grace, for the sake of Your Son, You have given us the holy Gospel, and have instituted the holy Sacraments, that through these we may have comfort and forgiveness of sin: We beseech You, grant us Your Holy Spirit, that we may heartily believe Your Word; and through the holy Sacraments day by day establish our faith, until we at last obtain eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*ELH*, p. 155)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the fifth chapter of St. John's First Epistle, beginning with the fourth verse:

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? / 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. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. 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. 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. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who gives us a share of His eternal victory by faith, dear fellow redeemed:

He had told them several times. He told them He had to suffer and die, and that He would be raised again on the third day (Mat. 16:21, 17:23, 20:19). But the disciples did not understand. They were so troubled by the thought of His death that His promise to rise did not even register with them. Peter let Jesus know what he thought about The Plan. He took Jesus aside and rebuked Him. He said, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" (Mat. 16:22).

It wasn't long before this that Peter had beautifully expressed the truth about who Jesus was: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Peter naturally did not want to see His great Teacher and Lord die. He may have also wondered whether this was even possible. If Jesus is truly God's Son, how could He die? But Jesus was not about to follow the will of Peter – the will of man. He followed the will of His Father in heaven, and His suffering, death, and resurrection happened exactly as He had predicted.

Yet even after His resurrection, the disciples struggled to believe it. The women came on Easter morning telling them about an open tomb, shining angels, and a message from Jesus. "[B]ut

these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (Luk. 24:11). How could it be true? The previous Friday, Jesus had died on the cross. There was no question about it. John himself was there. He saw the soldier pierce the side of Jesus, and he saw blood and water come out (Joh. 19:34). Jesus was dead. The disciples had watched Jesus call back Lazarus from the dead. But who could call back Jesus?

They did not believe it until Jesus appeared to them in the flesh on Easter evening. Since the doors were locked, at first they thought a spirit had come into their midst. But Jesus showed them the marks in His hands, feet, and side. He ate some fish in their presence (Luk. 24:42). Now they realized that He most certainly wasn't a ghost. This was Jesus, risen from the dead!

All of them were convinced, all except for Thomas. Thomas wasn't there when Jesus appeared. *"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails," he said, "and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (Joh. 20:25).* The next Sunday, the disciples including Thomas were all together, and Jesus appeared again. Now Thomas believed: *"My Lord and my God!"* he said (v. 28). Jesus said to him, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (v. 29).*

The skepticism of Thomas is the default position of many today regarding Jesus. They are willing to accept that He existed. They imagine He was probably a good guy. They like how He helped people in need. But they don't believe He is God, and they don't believe He came back to life after His death. The only way they would believe these things is if they had proof of some kind, like the proof that Thomas received.

The evidence that the apostle John brings forward is not the evidence one might expect. John says the proof that Jesus is the Son of God is found in *"the Spirit and the water and the blood."* This is a reference especially to the beginning and end of Jesus' public work. He was publicly identified as God's Son and the promised Savior at His Baptism. When He was baptized, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God descended like a dove and rested on Him. Then a voice from heaven said, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mat. 3:16-17).*

That is strong testimony of Jesus' identity. But how can we be certain it actually happened as described? Some people suggest that Jesus' closest disciples invented stories about His life. But if you wrote a story and included yourself in it, how would you portray yourself? The disciples are often described as weak, petty, and ignorant. Either those creative writers were extraordinarily humble, or they simply told the truth about themselves and Jesus.

The same goes for John the Baptizer. He was not an all-knowing prophet. He admitted he did not know Jesus was the promised Messiah until he baptized Him. But seeing what happened and hearing the voice of God the Father, he then proclaimed, *"this is the Son of God!" (Joh. 1:34).* So by *"the Spirit and the water"* God the Father testified that Jesus was His Son.

Going forward three years, Jesus was now in Jerusalem. He had entered the city on Palm Sunday and was preparing for His imminent death. *"Now is my soul troubled,"* He said. *"And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name" (Joh. 12:27-28).* Then a voice sounding like thunder came from heaven: *"I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (v. 28).* It was the voice of His heavenly Father.

And then it was time for the testimony of *"the blood."* The shedding of blood shows that Jesus was clearly a Man. Blood poured out of His back from the wounds of His flogging and from His head where the crown of thorns had been driven. It dripped from His hands and feet where the nails had pierced. But how does the blood prove His divinity? How does it show He is the Son of God?

If Jesus had died and remained dead, we would have to conclude that He was not who God said He was, that He was not the Son of God. But since He has risen, that changes the way we look at His crucifixion. His resurrection from the dead shows us that it wasn't just a regular Man hanging on the cross. It was the God-Man. His blood was holy blood shed for all people. His suffering was holy suffering, not for wrongs He had done but for the sins of the world. *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* He cried. His blood testifies that God the Father poured out His wrath against sin on His only Son in the place of all sinners.

"[T]he Spirit and the water and the blood." This is God the Father's testimony. *"[T]his is the testimony of God that He has borne concerning His Son."* And Jesus' resurrection is the bow that ties it all together. His resurrection proves that the testimony is true. It proves everything God declared about His Son and everything Jesus taught and did.

Those who deny Jesus' resurrection will make of Him whatever they want, but they won't have a Savior. You, on the other hand, who believe God's testimony, have everything He has graciously promised you. You will not be judged along with the unbelieving world on the last day, because you are covered in Christ's righteousness. You will not suffer eternal damnation in hell, because your sins are all forgiven. You will not remain in the grave, because Jesus will come again in glory to raise you from the dead.

All of these things are yours. You have been *"born of God"* by the power of the Holy Spirit. You were brought to faith in Jesus through His holy Word, so that His victory became your victory. He wants to continue to assure you and comfort you in this truth. He knows that the devil, the world, and your own flesh want to steal away your confidence. He knows how they try to use trials like the current pandemic to plant doubts in your mind about His love toward you and about the promises of His Word.

It is good that John recorded the doubts of Jesus' disciples after His resurrection. They doubted like we do. Our faith is not perfect. It is common for all Christians to wonder why God lets troublesome things happen, or why He doesn't fix a problem or help us in our need. We have also had doubts about whether we are right with God. How could He love people like us who have failed so miserably or done such bad things?

Jesus does not alleviate our doubts by appearing in person and showing us His hands and side like He did for Thomas. But He does set before us the testimony of His love through His Word and Sacraments. Publicly through His called servant and privately through the encouragement of fellow Christians, Jesus declares to us the forgiveness of our sins. As Jesus said to His disciples on Easter evening, so He still says to us, *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld"* (Joh. 20:22-23).

He also gives us the testimony of His Sacraments – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. “Baptism,” He says, “is My cleansing blood applied to you. It is My bringing you the victory of My death and resurrection. It is your rebirth as a holy child of God.” And the Lord’s Supper is His body given in the bread and His blood given in the wine “*for the remission of sins.*” In this Supper, our resurrected and exalted Lord comes to us personally and brings us His eternal blessings of forgiveness and life and salvation.

So just as “*the Spirit and the water and the blood*” testified in Jesus’ life that He really is the Son of God, so “*the Spirit and the water and the blood*” in His Word and Sacraments continue to testify to Him today. It is impossible for our limited minds to understand these things. How could the Son of God take on flesh, suffer, die, and rise again? How could He continue to meet us through His Word and Sacraments?

But though our minds cannot comprehend these things, they are most certainly true. **Jesus Really Is the Son of God.** He really did die for your sins and rise again in victory over your death. And He really does come to you today to bring you comfort, strength, and peace in every need.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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