

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity, October 26, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 24, 387:1, 371, 43, 391.

Lessons: Isaiah 55:1-11, Romans 8:35-39, Matthew 25:31-40.

Sermon Text: 1 John 4:11-19.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I think you all know the joy of completing a project.

It may seem silly or foolish to think of God in an anthropomorphic way, that is, imagining that he is in some ways like a human and is happy knowing that something is complete. But God pictures himself in many human ways, so that we have some inkling or hint of being able to understand him and what he is doing for us.

God's work of salvation is complete. Jesus said on the Cross "***it is finished***". (John 19:30) That gives us a picture and shows that is God's love for mankind. The work of Jesus Christ was done out of love for all mankind. You know the passage "***For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.***" (John 3:16) And we are reminded again today that

GOD'S LOVE IS MADE COMPLETE IN BELIEVERS

- 1. How do we know? He lives in us.**
- 2. He lives in us because he has given us the Holy Spirit.**
- 3. Thus love is made complete in us**
- 4. We can have confidence on Judgment Day and not be afraid.**
- 5. Without God no one can have love.**

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Christ's love defines our love. Christians are those whose foundation is love, and not just any love, but the love of God in Jesus, from which and for the sake of which we live, breathe, and have our being through Christ our Lord.

"No one has ever seen God." John repeats what he said at the beginning of his Gospel. "***No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.***" (John 1:18)

Although "***no one has seen God***", God's love is evident in the work of Christ and in the believer's love for others. To see the Father in the person of the Son is to see what physical eyes cannot see.

"But if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

The work of salvation was finished on the cross. And in John's encouragement to love one another we have another reminder that the love of God is made complete in us.

Here is evidence that God lives in us, by our loving one another. I think you are probably aware that some organisms live in other living things. We might think of terrible diseases living in a human body and taking over the body. The picture of cancer comes to mind. But this is something different living in a human. This is something good, not a disease that has taken over our lives. This is God living in us and we share with others, we reflect God's love. Well, how do we know that God's love is complete in us? The answer is that he lives in us, and we reflect God's love by loving one another.

He lives in us because he has given us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God lives in believers. This happened first at your Baptism as an infant, or if you were baptized later in life, as an adult, you heard the Word of God and the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit worked faith in you.

And God continues to give the Holy Spirit and his gifts to us. The message, the words of the Holy Spirit come into your life more and more when you hear or read the Word of God. For ***“holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”*** (2 Peter 1:21 KJV)

Because God’s Spirit is in us, we can agree with what John says. He tells us that ***“we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.”*** John personally saw Jesus. He was called from being a fisherman to be a fisher of men, one of Jesus’ first disciples. We haven’t personally, visibly seen Jesus as John did, but we see him through eyes of faith. We hear and learn of him and “see” him in the Scriptures. This is not seeing with the eyes, but a work of the Spirit in the mind and the heart.

You may remember Jesus showing the holes in his hands and feet and the wound in his side to the disciple called ‘doubting Thomas’. ***“Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*** (John 20:29) We are among those blessed ones, because we believe without physically seeing Jesus.

John makes sure we know he is telling the truth. He testifies ***“that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.”*** He is swearing, he is taking an oath that this is true.

Because God’s love is made complete in us, we acknowledge to anyone who will listen to us ***“that Jesus is the Son of God.”*** Thus God’s love is made complete in us.

John repeats what he has been saying to engrave it on our minds and hearts: ***“If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.”*** This isn’t a new thought. In fact, it is a central thought of this letter, and it is repeated here again for emphasis!

Then John elaborates on and speaks of the confidence that the love of God for us gives us: ***“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.”*** If you can rely on something or someone, you can trust them. If you rely on it, you count on it and can be sure that it will be there when you need and want it. Well, God’s love is there, just waiting for us to use it and to be wrapped in it.

John even tells us plainly that ***“God is love.”*** If you want a picture of God, look at true love. If you want a picture of true, genuine love, look at God.

God is not hate, anger, bitterness or deceit, but love.

“Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” Here is that relationship again. If you love, you live in God. If God lives in you, you love. If you have one, you have the other.

Because of this, ***“In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.”***

What is it that people often fear, especially when they are facing death? Even among pagans, isn’t it some kind of judgment that they haven’t been good enough or done enough to satisfy some kind of supreme being who will judge them?

The child of God, the believer, and that is the one to whom John has especially been writing, has no fear of eternal judgment. Because love is made complete among believers they ***“will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.”*** We can and do have confidence that God will not judge us as our sins deserve. We can and do have confidence that God will say to those who believe in him: ***“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”*** (Matthew 25:34) We can have confidence on judgment day and not be afraid,

We will have this confidence not only on judgment day but on every day leading up to judgment day. We can spend our hours and days and weeks in confident praise of God. We need not fear that we haven’t done enough to earn our salvation, because Jesus earned it all. God gives it to men because of his great love for mankind. .

To abide in the love of our God, who is love, is to know God as a loving and devoted father, not as a fearful Judge.

The faithful, who confess their sins and receive God’s forgiveness, do not fear, for theirs is the knowledge and conviction that theirs is a God who dearly loves his own and so provides for their every need. John assured us in chapter 1: ***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*** (1 John 1:9)

Satan will continue to torment us but we can say to him “get thee behind me” knowing that Jesus Christ has beaten the devil at his game of death. Jesus came back to life so that when he raises all mankind from the dead, everyone who believes in him will live eternally and receive the blessedness of heaven.

We know we are all sinners, through and through. But we will not be condemned because of our sins. Jesus tells us, too, ***“Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”*** (Matthew 9:2)

Because God’s project of making his love complete in us is finished, ***“we will have confidence on the day of judgment.”***

We are not sinless like Jesus was. Far from it. But God looks at us as though we are sinless because we are clothed in Jesus’ robes of righteousness. We are covered by Jesus’ perfection.

God has forgiven our sins. His grace is endless. But we must be careful lest we become careless. Paul asks in Romans ***“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”*** (Romans 6:1-4)

On judgment day, we can remind God, as if he could forget, – and remember, Jesus is interceding at God’s right hand – ‘God, you said ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”***’ (Mark 16:16)

Remember how it is that we have all this. This is a gift from our loving God, who is love.

Without God no one can have love. John tells us by inspiration of God: ***“We love because he first loved us.”*** You may have memorized this verse from the King James Version: ***“We live him because he first loved us.”*** Although evidence for the Greek text is stronger for the simple ***“We love”***, both certainly make sense. We cannot love God except that he loved us first. And we cannot show any love at all to anyone except that God loves us first!

Lord, keep your love in our hearts! Lord, keep giving your love to us! Amen.