

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Second Sunday after Trinity, June 29, 2014**

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

Hymns: 460, 237:1, 472, 412, 644.

Lessons: Isaiah 57:14-19, Acts 2:37-43, Matthew 22:34-40.

Sermon Text: 1 John 1:1-4.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Imagine meeting and worshiping with a very small group of believers. For many people in the world, that is not very appealing, when there are choices to be part of a large church with all kinds of special things going on. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *“we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.”* (1 Corinthians 1:23-26)

In most of our worship services we find ourselves part of a very small group. That is most likely the situation John was writing to. When we hear that 3000 were brought to faith in Jesus Christ on Pentecost, we think in terms of huge churches, don't we? But remember that there were people from 15 different nations named on Pentecost, and although we aren't told how many different languages the Gospel of Jesus Christ was proclaimed in on that day, there were likely at least that many languages. Now 3000 is a large number, but when you divide it by 15 that is a much smaller number. And remember that when Paul sends greetings to the church in Romans 16 which meets at the house of Priscilla and Aquila, we realize that many groups of Christians, or 'congregations' as we would call them, were obviously not large groups.

However, we must also remember that Jesus makes it clear that *“where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”* (Matthew 18:20)

But no matter how small a group we may be on earth, the book of Revelation speaks of thousands upon thousands upon thousands – really, an uncountable number – of believers around the throne of Jesus in heaven. And we believers today gathered here have fellowship with each and every one of those believers! And it is not only fellowship with those believers, but also fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

**JOHN WRITES TO US ...**

- 1. So that believers may have fellowship with God and with fellow confessors of Christ.**
- 2. What this fellowship really means.**
- 3. John wants the joy of believers to be complete.**

The reason for John writing this letter by inspiration of the Holy Ghost is made clear in chapter 2: *“I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.”* (1 John 2:26) And who isn't trying to lead us astray from the truth of the Word of God? Luther names the devil, our flesh, and the world. There are billions of people in the world, and although not all of them are trying to lead you astray from God, I am sure that every one of you could name a handful in the past week whom you communicated with who would like to lead you astray from the Word of God. That makes John's reason for writing this letter all the more important.

After identifying Jesus Christ as the real contents of this letter, John continues with these words: *“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.”*

John tells us what he has personally seen and heard and experienced so that we may have “fellowship”.

John uses the special term “Word” to refer to Christ himself. Words reveal and convey thoughts and messages from one mind to another. Jesus Christ is God’s ultimate self-revelation, his ultimate communication of his love. Jesus is God’s personal Word in addition to and in fulfillment of his many spoken words.

This is important because all people are born dying on a dying planet. All people at birth are sinful, outside of God’s family, spiritually dead, facing a life of pain, certain death, and condemnation in hell. The Word that brings life to people comes through the message of the apostles. That message works faith in people’s hearts, faith which then connects people into fellowship with God the Father, with his Son, and with all other believers. John was worried that his readers were losing their confidence in the message and in the original messengers, and so he wrote this letter so they and we also may have fellowship with the apostles, with the Father, and with his Son.

John started by talking about the Word of life. In the words after our sermon text, John moves on to the general thought "God is Light" and he shows that walking in the light involves fellowship with God and with the Christian brotherhood, consciousness and confession of sin and keeping God's commandments. It excludes hatred of the brethren, love of the world, and following and paying attention to false teachers.

I think that you all know what “fellowship” means. When it comes to church and what God teaches, we usually just don’t use the word “fellowship” without adding the word “church”, meaning “church fellowship”.

In its very simplest definition, church fellowship means doing religious things together. And that is what John is talking about. In a sense we can have fellowship, or camaraderie or sharing mutual interests with other people in just about anything, from sports to work to hobbies. But John here is using the word “fellowship” in the context of what we today call “church fellowship”. He is not, at this point, talking about the kind of fellowship we might have with a softball team or work buddies or even relatives who don’t believe and teach and confess as we do. He is talking about the sharing, the intimacy, the participation, the association, the shared activities and experiences as believers in Jesus Christ. This includes all sorts of things, such as similar interests and values, the sharing and friendship as well as the intimacies of praying together, worship, baptism, and the communion of the true body and blood of Jesus Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine.

I find it especially disturbing when one Christian in our midst feels that he or she is not treated civilly and pleasantly by another in our midst. Shouldn’t we all be disturbed by this? It is easy to ignore or snub someone. But among those with whom we worship, sing praise to God, and join in the communion of our Lord’s body and blood, shouldn’t there always be a sincere feeling of love and caring about one another and a showing, a display of that love and appreciation for one another?

Sure, our sinful flesh leads our lives at times. But that is no excuse for not showing and feeling genuine oneness with our fellow confessing Christians. That we have a sinful flesh is a confession of sin, not an excuse for what we do or don’t do.

And, just as in any family, even a human family of relatives, there may be times when we just don’t like someone very much. But then as fellow confessing Christians we have opportunity to confess our sins to God and to one another, to apologize to one another, and seek to make amends for any such lack of visible fellowship. When we don’t feel such Christian fellowship it hurts, and our hearts ache.

Remember John’s goal ***“that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”***

When we think of fellowship and of church fellowship, we often think of visible organizations, such as what we call congregations, or conferences, or synods. But we must remember that none of Scripture defines and identifies the only visible way that New Testament Christians, that a group of Christians must be organized. The forms we have today, with baptized membership, communicant membership, voting membership and incorporated organizations are appropriate for convenience and for legal reasons in our country and in our states.

Throughout this letter John will be defining and refining how this kind of fellowship takes place on earth.

John and the other disciples made it the work of their entire life to preach the wonderful Gospel-message, to tell the wondrous story of Jesus and his work of redemption, in order that other people also might learn to know Christ, to believe in him, and thus to enter into the most intimate spiritual fellowship with the

apostles and with all true believers. By faith all believers on earth, regardless of race and social position, are united in the Holy Christian Church, in the communion of saints. But this fellowship involves even more. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are parts of the body of Christ, with Christ being the head. And you know that when any one part of your physical body is hurting, it affects your entire body. The whole body suffers. By faith the Christians are not only united in a visible group holding to the same doctrines and held together by the same confession, but they have become members of the body of Christ and enter into intimate relationship with God the Father himself. Just as Jesus himself repeatedly testified, his heavenly Father is also our Father by virtue of the redemption of Christ. Scripture makes it plain that ***"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*** (Galatians 3:26)

The Savior has removed all cause of enmity by bearing both our sins and their guilt and atoning for them with his blood, in this way reconciling God the Father to us. Thus we are all children of God not only by creation but also by faith in Christ Jesus as our Redeemer from all our sin. It is a wonderful, a glorious relationship in which we stand. No wonder the apostle is constrained to add: ***"We write this to make our joy complete."***, or as the King James Version reads ***"that your joy may be full."*** In the Greek, as in English, there is one letter's difference between "our" and "your". Some ancient manuscripts read one, some the other. But both make sense. John wants his joy to be full, and he also wants all to share in the joy of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

This assurance of the sonship of God, of the fact that all causes for apprehension and fear have been removed, will always have the same effect upon Christians, namely, that of making their joy in faith complete and perfect. It will cause them to rest their salvation in Christ and their heavenly Father without the slightest hesitation or doubt. It will give them that inexpressible happiness of faith which no man can take from the believers, which they retain in the very midst of misery and tribulation. That is John's introduction to his letter, a remarkable example of the comforting quality of the Gospel-message.

And what is the joy that we share? Remember why Jesus came to earth: We quote from the second chapter of this book: ***"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*** (1 John 2:1-2)

We know that everyone sins, and especially we know that we sin. The Law of God makes that obvious and plain. God's goal for us is that we do not sin. But we sin daily and much, in thought, word, and deed.

But remember that we have an advocate, ***"one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."*** He assures us of the forgiveness of our sins. ***"Jesus Christ, the Righteous One... is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*** Jesus paid the price for our sins. Believe that and be saved!

May the true fellowship which we have in Jesus Christ keep us together, forgiving one another and comforting one another with the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.