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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
May 9, 2021
5th Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: Acts 11:19-26, John 15:9-17

Hymns: 352; 349:1-4; 397:1-4; 50:2

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 John 4:1-11

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

⁴You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵They are of the world. Therefore they speak *as* of the world, and the world hears them. ⁶We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Taking things for granted.

It happens all too easily in our lives. The best things in our lives, things that are there all the time for our good and blessing, those things that really make life good, are often the things that we take for granted. We slip into the assumption that they will always be there, and so we neglect the very things that we ought to cherish most, the things that we ought to guard and keep. It happens in marriages that faithful and loving spouses are taken for granted, and not shown love and appreciation like one ought to be demonstrating daily. Today is Mother's Day! It is a day set aside by society to show some appreciation for mothers across our country, and thank them for all they do, before everyone slips back into taking mothers for granted again tomorrow.

A review of Bible history and church history reveals that this is a pattern of behavior with the gospel and a nation's relationship with a faithful and loving God. It doesn't take long for a people or a church body to take the Lord for granted and neglect the truth of God's love in preference for the joys or the wisdom of this world. And then it doesn't take long after that for the pure gospel to slip away and be lost. That which is most precious is too easily lost when taken for granted, when people assume it will always be there for them when they actually want it, or feel the need for it. What happens is one loses track, and then doesn't feel the need, and no longer knows enough to turn back.

How could one do that with this marvelous gospel of a crucified and risen and ever-living Savior? This truth that we have been celebrating over the past several Sundays, how could we ever lose track of that wonder of God's love and grace?

Well, sinful humans have been neglecting and then losing sight of the pure gospel since the days of the Apostles. It is why the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle John to write the encouragement for --

THEME: Preserving Among Us. the Gospel of God's Love.

The Lord calls upon us to be diligent in –

I. Discerning Between Truth and Error.

Our text begins with a warning not to believe every spiritual teacher that comes along. Already in the days of John there were many teachers that were following the same route that the apostles had taken on their missionary journeys, presenting themselves as being even more qualified than the apostles. They were teaching the people many false teachings, some of them regarding the person of Jesus Himself. John wrote that “*Many false prophets have gone out into the world.*” (v.1) Many of these individuals were extremely intelligent and yet they had deceived themselves into believing that their spiritual insights were a “superior wisdom” to the inspired words of the apostles and prophets. They were impressive speakers who seemed to possess impeccable credentials to be following up after the apostles, but they were false teachers deceiving the people.

It was important for the early Christians throughout Christendom to test these teachers to determine if they actually were from God, drawing their teachings from the Spirit of God, or from men. How is anyone supposed to be able to do that? One needs to address the question, “Are they teaching the truth about Jesus Christ?” John pointed these early believers right to the heart of the gospel. Were they teaching that Jesus Christ came in the flesh? Were they teaching the truth about the Son of God becoming incarnate, that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, and that He was and is both true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man born of the virgin Mary, in one person? That was the teaching that was under attack in much of early church history.

If the teachers didn’t get that right they were not from God. That truth comes to us from the Holy Spirit. It lies at the very heart of the gospel. If people taught that Jesus was not truly God, or that Jesus only looked human, or that He stopped being God when He suffered and died, or that He stopped being human anywhere along the way, then they were certainly not teachers of the gospel of God’s love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

This fundamental truth of the gospel still comes under attack today. There are teachers rising up within what is called Christianity that are attempting to explain away the virgin birth of Christ or denying that Jesus was God from all eternity. They are still seeking to deceive, and we must be on our guard. There are many false prophets that have gone out into the world. When we think it doesn't matter that much, when we think, "All the different churches believe in Jesus so what's the difference? then one is in danger of being deceived and losing that precious gospel of God's love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Don't take the truth of a crucified and risen Savior for granted!

There is a saying that goes something like this, "*If you don't stand for something then you will fall for anything.*" We need to take a stand for the truth of the gospel. And to do that we need to be diligent in studying the Scriptures and knowing the truth of God's Word. There are many forces working against Christ and His Word in the world. They were there when John first wrote these words of warning, they are present in the world today, and they will be present until Jesus comes again in glory.

Many of the false teachings that are found within many American churches today find their appeal in human reason, and our natural view of our own spiritual nature. We want to believe that there is a kernel of goodness existing in each of us, not only in the sense that we should find reason to get along with people, but in the sense that each individual has redeeming qualities for eternal life with God. People, including each of us, want to believe, "*I'm a good person, and God sees that, and God likes me because of that.*" We want to "feel" close to God because of the way we behave. People insist that there must be a spark of the divine within us all, for "*Aren't we all children of God?*" That whole series of lies has been making its way through humanity since the world began, and Adam and Eve were deceived by the devil, and it has been making its way through visible Christianity since the days of the Apostles.

Beware! We are **not** of the world! We **are** of Christ! Paul wrote of this also saying, "*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.* ⁸ Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy

and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (Colossians 2:6-9) You see the world is unrelenting in its attacks on the gospel. It is essential to our soul’s salvation that we stick to the truth of Jesus Christ as it is presented to us in the Holy Scriptures. This is about preserving the gospel among us so that we are not cheated out of the truth of the gospel by fine sounding arguments of this world.

Staying faithful to the gospel is not something done by our own will or determination. It is a work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works through the Word, confirming us in the truth. If we take the truth of Jesus for granted, it we think to ourselves that we know all we need to know, we are setting ourselves up for a fall. Again, the world is unrelenting in its attacks on our faith. It presents all its appealing and supposedly loving reasons for us to turn away from Scripture truth in favor of being more open and accepting, and loving of people just like they are, embracing them in their sin, and telling them they have God’s peace, even as they continue in sin. That is NOT love!

Of course, God loves them. Because He loves them He sent His Son into the world to redeem them. Of course, God loves them, and because He loves all sinners, He calls for repentance among all sinners, denying ungodliness, and trusting in Jesus for righteousness and redemption. That is the message which the Lord has entrusted to us. *“He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”* (v.6)

John would direct us in --

II. Persevering in Christian Love.

We read in the last four verses of our text:

1 John 4: 7-11 “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we 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.”

How do we live in love for one another? It isn't what the world defines as love. It is what we have learned from God through faith in Jesus. God revealed His love to us in Jesus! He sent His only-begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. There is that neat word again that instructs us in the true measure of grace that we have in the gospel – “propitiation!” Jesus died for our sins. He paid the price we could not pay. He paid it all. But more than that, this word “propitiation” informs us that what Jesus accomplished in His sufferings and death appeased the wrath of God. In the greatness of His love toward us we have been brought into peace with God by the death of His Son.

This is the measure by which we are to love others. If God loved us to this extent so we ought to love one another. That can not be done apart from Christ and His gospel. Our greatest act of love is to call sinners to repentance, to proclaim Christ to others, that they might know the peace of forgiveness and the hope of everlasting life in His name.

If we are to love even as God loved us, it is essential that we be diligent about preserving among us the Gospel of God's love.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.