

“If We Love One Another, God Dwells In Us”

I John 4:12-16,
Trinity Sunday May 31, 2015

Sermon Text, 1 John 4:12-16:

“No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

Beloved of the Lord.....Today is not only Trinity Sunday, but also a Baptism Sunday with Holy Communion. It is a full day, a blessed day, and it is a perfect day to open a sermon by discussing the Means of Grace. Only in the Lutheran Church, or at least a proper Lutheran Church, do we have the correct Biblical doctrine concerning the Means of Grace. Because Christ laid down His life for all sinners, the only way a person can be converted and become a believer, is by the Means of Grace, which is the Gospel Word which comes to us in its various forms. For example, when we in the Lutheran Church baptize a little baby, this child born in sin is saved by the Means of Grace God has given this child. The forgiveness of sins which Jesus earned for that child upon the cross, God gives to that child by the Gospel Word contained and given through Holy Baptism. So the Bible says, Christ “loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” The washing of water by the Word is Baptism, a Means of Grace, God’s way, God’s means of delivering and bringing to that child a spiritual washing, a spiritual regeneration, conversion, a holy birth, from above, as Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” By such words Jesus teaches us that Baptism is a spiritual birth whereby that person enters the kingdom of God, and His Holy Spirit is given at that time of Baptism.

Yet today we did not have the Baptism of a child, but an adult. Moreover before he was baptized and throughout my time of instruction with him, he made a good confession regarding Christ, and now publicly today also in front of this congregation. Was he converted by Baptism, born again by Baptism? The answer is NO, but he was still converted by the Means of Grace, namely the Gospel Word which God sent to him and taught his heart. Thus again let it be said: because Christ laid down His life for all sinners, the only way a person can be converted and become a believer, is by the Means of Grace, which is the Gospel Word which comes to us in its various forms. We either believe or do not believe the Gospel. Forgiveness of sins can only be received by faith, because “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.” But why then do we have baptism of adults, if they can be converted by the Gospel Word earlier? We baptize adults for two main reasons. The FIRST reason is God has commanded it, for Jesus said “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” This young man is included in the words of Jesus, all nations, just as all infants and children. He is one of many for whom Christ died and rose again. But the SECOND reason we baptize adults is this: because God through Baptism has given us a wonderful promise, namely “Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” When a person is baptized, they can be certain because God has promised, all their sins have been washed away by Jesus who paid for their sins on the cross. Our baptism gives us a good conscience which sees in the resurrection of Christ, peace and forgiveness of all sins. Baptism is the Gospel. In our Baptism Jesus says to us, “Son be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee, go in peace!” So it is that Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, “That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

So it is now written, No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. When the Lord appeared to Moses at the top of Mt. Sinai, the Lord told Moses, “I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.” But “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.” In like manner even in Isaiah’s vision of the Lord in the temple, or John’s visions in Revelation, though they also saw the Lord in glory, this was never the Lord in ALL His divine glory. If we ourselves were to approach God now in our present sinful state, this would be like a dark shadow approaching the brilliant light of the sun. Such a light chases darkness away. Darkness cannot draw near the light nor approach. First Timothy six therefore tells us that Jesus dwells “in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.” Only when we reach heaven will we be able to approach that perfect light which God dwells in and the honor of seeing God face to face in ALL His glory, is reserved only for His dear children that die in the blessed faith of Jesus.

But now If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Though we cannot see God, nor do we see His Spirit visibly come to us in our Baptism, our works of love for one another in this world, prove to us that God is dwelling and living in us. Since you now have a beginning of good works, and you really do love and care for your fellow man, and you especially hope and pray for their salvation, such is a proof to each believer the Holy Spirit is now in us, his love perfected in us, namely accomplished, active, and working. Such a love ought to then be evident in our life daily by the way we treat our fellow Christians, also strangers and enemies. Hebrews 13 reminds us, “Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” We should be hospitable to all who come into our home and treat them with kindness, just as Jesus has welcomed us into God’s Kingdom. Brotherly love will especially be evident in the Christian home, by the unselfish spirit that puts the needs of our spouse or children before our own personal

desires. Godly love is sacrificial love. If you really love someone you will sacrifice what you love for their sake. You will put their desires and needs before your own without complaint, because God's love is working in you. Hebrews 13 also says, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Conversation here means your entire manner or way of life. When our faith rests upon God our Provider above, we shouldn't feel sorry for ourselves or complain about what we don't have. Don't we have Christ? Don't we have forgiveness of all sins and life everlasting? Don't we have our Father above who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift? So it is written "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. Sacrificial and selfless works of love thus are a proof to us that God dwells in us and we in Him "because God hath given us of His Spirit", the Holy Spirit. So it is written in First Corinthians six "that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Your body belongs to God. Your spirit belongs to God, because Jesus bought you with the price of His blood. If you live a selfish life where your own needs and desires come first before your neighbor, you are defiling your own body and soul which are the temple of the Holy Ghost. But if you see all your gifts and talents and wealth as unmerited gifts from God, you will use them as God intends, to help your neighbor in a sacrificial way. By such selfless works of love also it will be evident God has given you His Spirit, and by God's Spirit you are now in communion and fellowship with God. Believers then know they are believers in part by their works of love toward and for one another. When a fellow Christian in our congregation is hurting because they are under a heavy cross, we feel for them and we pray for them, and we bear one another's burdens. Also when a brother or sister is in true need, we do not give them a cold shoulder. Jesus said, "whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." Mt. 5 So it is written "let us not love in word only, but in deed and in truth." Our words are empty and meaningless if our actions do not agree. It is easy to say "I love you", but if our actions do not show this love, we are lying to ourselves and our neighbor. But likewise let it be said, if you saw your neighbor in need and you stepped forward to help, this is because God's Spirit dwells within you, and He is a Spirit of love.

And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. Since this is Trinity Sunday let us understand the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is not the offspring of the Father, but He is indeed the only-begotten of the Father from eternity, full of grace and truth. From eternity Jesus was the only-begotten of the Father in the sense of precious and loved. Moreover, what better way could the Father show His grace for us, than by sending and giving what was most precious to Him, His-only begotten Son to be "the Savior of the world." The Father gave Himself by giving His Son, likewise the Son gave Himself "for all, that we which live should not henceforth live

unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again.” And if we measure and compare our love to His, how far do we fall short of God’s glory, God’s love? Even that most precious and sacred and intimate love a husband may have for his wife, is but a drop in the bucket compared to the love of Christ for our soul. Indeed those who believe in Him will not burn in hell for their sins, because the love in Christ’s heart for our salvation burned stronger than God’s hatred for our sins. God’s love consumed His hate, because “God is love” and “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down His life for His friends.” How then can our love on earth compare to His love from heaven? Therefore by grace and grace alone are we saved because “God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”

That Gospel, dear believers, is what causes us to confess that Jesus is the Son of God. And by this our confession, it is certain God dwells in us and we in God. Each true believer is in communion with God, by His love for us and our love toward and for one another. With such a love there is service. “By love SERVE one another.” Now because the Father and the Son are equal, as is the Holy Spirit, the Father had no authority over the Son to send Him. The Father is not above the Son, but equal to the Son. Yet as True Man, our Substitute in our stead, Christ did earnestly want to fulfill the will of the Father, even from eternity, yet He also said “I and My Father are one.” To love is to serve. Consider then how God was in authority over us.....He is our Superior and we FAR inferior, yet by love the Son of God came down to serve us, even unto death. If then through the cross we see our Superior serving us, how much more should we serve Him and all men? Even if God has given us an office of authority like that of a father or pastor, we only fulfill that office if we by love serve those under our authority. Love is the highest law, and there is no law except the law of love. To love is to serve, and to serve is to love. But if I don’t want to serve, I cannot love, and if I cannot love I will never serve. So it is written regarding the serving of others, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

Finally beloved We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. This morning, by the grace of God, we had a young man publicly confess and declare His love for Christ when he became a member of this congregation. This is because the Gospel came to Him by the Holy Spirit who taught Him God’s grace, and now given him the seal of His grace by Holy Baptism. God’s love was working and is still working among us, for God is love! If you live in that love of God, rest assured God lives in you and dwells in you and communes with you as you with Him. “Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.” The Holy Spirit also will help you to bring forth those fruits of love which you so desire because God is love. Thanks be to God we know and believe and are certain of the love that God hath to us “for no man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” May God help us, every one, by His own love which lives in our hearts, to love one another with a pure heart fervently, not only in word, but in deed and truth. Amen.