

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

May 10, 2015

1 John 4:1-11

Blest Be the Tie that Binds

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Dearly loved by God in Christ Jesus,

It would be a mistake to think our common confessions of faith bind us together. Our joining together in speaking the creeds and our subscription to historical Lutheran teaching as the basis for our church membership are the results of our unity.

The characteristics, the tie that binds us together, are truth and love. Those two things are not mutually exclusive, as some would believe today. Nor is one more essential or important than the other. Which of your two eyes or two arms would you be willing to give up?

St. John exhorts us not to give up either the truth of God's Word or the love we have for one another that comes from God. We say in the words of our closing hymn for today, **Blest Be the Tie that Binds**. The truth of God unites those who confess it. The love of God unites those who manifest it.

You know there are a vast variety of teachings in the visible Christian church. The cults also misuse the Bible to establish and support their beliefs. Many false prophets have gone out into the world and claim to be God's inspired spokesmen. We Christians dare not "believe every spirit." We must "test the spirits to see if they are from God." We do that by examining critically and carefully all claims by those who say they speak for God. Believing everybody can be just as dangerous as believing nobody.

Think of a balance, or litmus paper, we use to test something's validity. On one side, John says, we have the Spirit's revelation in Holy Scripture that Jesus is God's incarnate eternal Son. Jesus is both human and divine. Those "spirits," or preachers, who preach this are from God.

We understand that the Bible is not only about one or two teachings about Jesus. We know every word and teaching of Scripture touches the gospel. Only those who teach the full truth about our Savior's person and work are from God. He is from God and his message is from God.

On the other side we have the supposed signs or miracles this or that prophet performs. It might be the personal magnetism of the preacher or his winning style. The appearance of great intellect or scholarship can easily impress us.

We Christians need constantly to be on guard and weigh the truth of God's Word against other claims and traits. Those false claims are "the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and even now is already in the world." These teachings and those who proclaim are not from God. They can't be. Their doctrine has another source, the liar and the father of lies.

The way we have overcome them is not because we have any special quality of our own. The Holy Spirit is in us. The Spirit of truth is greater than that liar, Satan, who is in the world. We are God's "dear children." Since we are from God, "whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us."

Another way to test teachers is by considering their audience. False teachers have no trouble gathering crowds who think the world's thoughts and speak the world's language. So, these spirits speak that language to what St. Paul calls their "itching ears." Those who preach the words of Jesus and the apostles find an audience in God's people who are glad to listen to their message. They know that message comes from God's real messengers.

This is how we distinguish the Spirit of truth from the spirit of falsehood. We examine the message to see if it is the full truth about Jesus Christ. We consider the audience to see if it the people of the world or the people of God.

The second characteristic that binds us together is the love of God. John addresses his readers is a play on words lost in the English, "friends." John wrote, "Beloved, let us love." First, the love God is God's love for us in Christ. It is agape. This love cannot be known, experienced or shown apart from God. God's love for us in Christ ties us together. This is our unity in the church.

What follows as the love of God is our agape for each other and our neighbors. We demonstrate that we are dearly loved by dearly loving others. That life of loving ties us together as well. Unlike God's love for us, our love for each other is imperfect. Sometimes it is lacking all together in what we say or do not say, or in what we do or fail to do. Still, with our agape we manifest our heavenly Father's nature to some degree. Agape is there.

John contrasts those born of God and who know God with those who do not know him. There is no love there because there is no relationship with the Father. Those who claim to be the children of God but do not love show their claim to be a hollow one.

St. John describes true love. True love is not a feeling or desire but an action. God is love and showed that love among us. Demonstrated is a better word than showed. The Father sent his one and only Son. That Son sacrificed himself for us who did not deserve anything from God. Regardless of the cost to himself, Jesus loved us as the atoning sacrifice for all our sins.

Jesus Christ has redeemed us all by his holy blood and his vicarious death. The cause of that love was not that we were so loveable. The prime cause is because God is love.

“Beloved, since God so love us, we also ought to love one another.”  
This is the only conclusion the Spirit leads us to. Do I have to weigh both sides and then answer the question, Will I love the other person in spite of their sins and faults? No, there is only one way to go. It is the way of love.

It is like answering the question, Will I follow Satan’s lies or follow the Spirit of truth? There is only one way to go, the way of truth. The way of truth and the way of love. These are the tie that binds our hearts. Amen. <SDG>