

# FAITH AND LOVE

1 John 5:1-8

Sixth Sunday of Easter (Series B)

May 9, 2021

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The epistle lesson for the Sixth Sunday of Easter comes from *The First Letter of John*, chapter 5, verses 1 through 8. In this Scripture passage, the apostle John summarizes the entire Christian life. Please stand as you are able for God's Holy Word. From 1 John 5, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

<sup>4</sup> For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

<sup>6</sup> This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

<sup>7</sup> For there are three that testify: <sup>8</sup> the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

***He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!***

---

The entire Christian life can be summarized in two words: *faith* and *love*. These are the two key words of this Scripture text: *faith* and *love*. By the way, the word *believe* is the same as the word *faith* in the Bible. For some reason, in English we have two different words: *faith* and *believe*. But in Greek—that's the language the New Testament was written in—there is only one word (πίστις). So anytime you see the word *believe* in the New Testament, that's always the same as the word *faith*. So we get this word *faith* or *believe* three times in this text. And the word *love* appears five times. These are the two key words for today: *faith* and *love*.

Last week we had one key word. It was the word *abide* (John 15:1-8). And Jesus continued to use that word today in the gospel lesson when he says, “**Abide in my love**” (John 15:9). Today we have two key words: *faith* and *love*. And John does not use the word *love* to refer to God's love here. Elsewhere he does, of course, but here he is speaking of our love. That is, our love for God and our love for those around us. And it is these two words, *faith* and *love*, that summarize the entire Christian life.

One of my pastor friends often says the same thing with different words. I can name him. It's a good thing, and some of you know him; he grew up here. Pastor Jason Gudim says the Christian life consists of two parts: *assurance of salvation* and *vocation*. Assurance of salvation: that's faith. And vocation: that's love. And we'll unpack what those words mean. Faith, or

## FAITH AND LOVE (1 John 5:1-8)

*assurance of salvation*, is the confidence we have that our sins are forgiven because Jesus died and rose again. And love, or *vocation*, is obedience to God's commandments.

Faith and love are not the same thing. We must distinguish them from one another. But they do have a relationship to one another. Faith sets us free to love. The other way to say it is this: assurance of salvation sets us free to fulfill our vocations. There is no doctrine of vocation without assurance of salvation. And there is no love without faith in Christ. And whenever there is assurance of salvation, vocation follows. Whenever there is faith in Jesus Christ, love follows.

This is essential for us to understand as Christians. Our natural, sinful minds are often tempted to confuse faith and love, or especially to confuse the places of faith and love. The devil tempts us to put love in the place where faith should be, and this leads to a burdened conscience.

Remember, faith is believing that our sins are forgiven because Jesus died and rose again. On the other hand, love is obedience to God's commandments. This is what the apostle John teaches us in his letter.

Concerning faith, he says, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God" (5:1). He goes on to say, "And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (5:4-5). Faith is believing that our sins are forgiven because Jesus, the Son of God, died and rose again. And this faith, according to John, is the victory. And to say that faith is the victory, is really to say that Jesus is the victory, because faith simply trusts Jesus for the victory. So this is how we know that God loves us: Jesus died for us and rose again. This is how we know our sins are forgiven: Jesus died for us and rose again. This is how we know that we will be raised from the dead to spend eternity in God's new creation: Jesus died for us and rose again. This is faith.

Love is different. Love is not believing. Love is not feeling. Love is doing. John defines love this way when he says, quite clearly, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (5:3). How do we love God? We obey his commandments. Love is doing. More specifically, love is doing what God has commanded. So love is good. Love is very, very good.

But the temptation we face is to put love in the place where faith belongs. What I mean is, when we ask the questions, "How do I know God loves me? How do I know I am forgiven? How do I know I will be raised from the dead to live forever in the new creation?" instead of answering those questions with faith, "Because Jesus died for me and rose again," we mistakenly answer those questions with love, "Because I obey God's commandments." This is pride. It is the wrong answer, and it leads to doubt and despair. But our sinful nature is often tempted to think this way. Sometimes we call this "works righteousness" or "salvation by works." It's earning our way into God's good graces, and it doesn't work. It cannot work. It never works. We are not saved by our love for God. Rather, we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, which is to say, *we are saved by God's love to us in Christ Jesus*. Faith trusts God's love for us. Pride trusts our love for God, and it cannot save us. Faith trusts God's love for us, so faith always saves us.

And love follows faith. This is essential for every Christian to understand. "We love because [God] first loved us" (4:19). First we trust God's love for us. That's faith. And then we love God and we love those around us. Our love for God and our love for our neighbors always follows faith. It has to be this way, because, before faith, there is only fear. Faith trusts that God is gracious to us. Without that faith, there is only fear of God, and I don't mean the pious, childlike fear of God, but the kind of fear that is terrified of God as if he is a harsh master. And when we are terrified of God, we cannot love him. Before faith, we might outwardly obey God's commandments. We might not murder, we might not steal, we might obey some of the other commandments, but we do this out of fear of punishment, not love for God's gift of salvation. So

faith always comes before our love for God. When we believe that our sins are forgiven because Jesus died and rose again, then we are finally free to love God. “Perfect love casts out fear” (4:18). That is, God’s perfect love for us in Christ Jesus casts out fear. When we believe that we are forgiven for Jesus’ sake, there is no reason to fear God’s punishment. Then love follows faith.

This is why John can say, “His commandments are not burdensome” (5:3). That’s a really shocking thing to say. God has a lot of commandments. People who like to count say there are 613 commandments in the Old Testament alone. Plus there are a bunch more in the New Testament. If we have to keep all of the commandments in order to earn God’s favor, that would be an impossible burden. It’s hard enough just learning what all of the commandments are. Then the next step is learning how to apply all of them. What circumstances call for what commandment? That’s situation ethics. It’s what the Pharisees during the time of the New Testament did. They created all sorts of extra commandments to clarify how one should apply God’s Law in different situations. And it got really confusing. But even if we could master both of these things, even if we could learn all of the commandments and understand how they should be applied, we still wouldn’t have touched our biggest obstacle. And that is our own wills. There is the problem that we just don’t have it in us to obey all God’s commandments. So our hearts condemn us. The Law seems like a gigantic burden. But John says, “His commandments are not burdensome.” That is because we are not saved by our love for God. That is, we are not saved by obedience to his commandments. Rather, we are saved through faith. We believe that Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead. This is how we know we are children of God. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.” We look to Jesus, and there we see how God has adopted us. There we see how God has loved us.

John speaks of Jesus as “he who came by water and blood” (5:6). And he says, “There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood” (5:8). I think this makes every reader stop and wonder what he’s talking about. “Spirit” is the easiest to understand. John is talking about the Holy Spirit, who speaks by the Word of God. But what does John mean by “the water and the blood”? I wonder if he might be referring to the Sacraments: Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. That could be part of what John means. These Sacraments, along with the Word of God, deliver God’s grace to us. In this way they testify that Jesus has saved us. But John’s primary meaning is probably that scene at the cross, which he recorded in *The Gospel of John*, where the soldiers thrust a spear into Jesus side and blood and water came out (John 19:34). This testified to the soldiers that Jesus was truly dead, and it testifies to us that Jesus has paid the price for our sin. For this reason, God’s commandments are not burdensome. Yes, we have failed. We have broken all the commandments. Even when we’ve tried our hardest, we have broken God’s commandments. This should be a heavy burden to us. But it’s not, because Jesus has paid the price for every one of those sins to remove that burden from us.

And this changes the way we view God’s commandments. Now we think, *I can sin as much as I want, because it doesn’t matter anymore*, right? No. Well, maybe we do think that way sometimes, but we really shouldn’t. Instead, we begin to love God’s commandments. We begin to realize that he is our gracious Father. He has not given us commandments in order to spoil our fun, but to protect us from harm. It’s the same as how parents make rules in their homes in order to protect their children. God’s commandments are not burdensome. His commandments are the framework for a peaceful and happy life in his house. And we love the Father because he has loved us far more than we could ever love him.

## FAITH AND LOVE (1 John 5:1-8)

So let's consider our love for God. Remember, love is an action word. Love is doing. And John says, "Everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him." We love God by loving everyone else whom God loves, and especially his other children. It's just like in the family. Parents desire for their children to love each other and be kind to one another. So they make rules to govern how the children should treat one another. And the children love their parents by obeying these rules. That is, they love their parents by loving their brothers and sisters. So here's a good little Mother's Day nugget: Kids, do you love your mom? Yes, you do. Of course, you do. How can you show your love for your mom? By loving your brothers and sisters. Love the other people that your mom loves. Your mom loves you and wants you to be loved, and she loves your siblings and wants them to be loved. So you love your mom by loving your brothers and sisters. That's how it is in our families, and that is also how it is in the family of God. God loves you, and he loves his other children. So we love God by loving the other children of God. "Everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him." And we do this by keeping God's commandments. The commandments instruct us in the will of God, so that we can love those around us as God wants them to be loved. In this way we love God.

It's similar to what Jesus teaches regarding the two great commandments. He says, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'** On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40). Love God. Love your neighbor. These are the two greatest commandments. And Jesus says the second one is like the first. That is, if you want to obey the great commandment of loving God, the practical way in which we usually do this is by loving those whom God loves. "Everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him."

And how do we love those around us? This is worth considering, because we often mess this up. How do we love those around us? Do we love them by treating them the way they want to be treated? Sometimes, but not always. I think all people want to be treated with kindness and respect. And this, of course, is the will of God. In most cases, treating people the way they want to be treated is in harmony with God's will. But sometimes the world pushes this too far, saying, "Whatever a person wants, that's what we should give them. Whatever they want to be called, that's what we should call them. Whatever they want us to affirm, that's what we should affirm." But this may cause us to bear false witness or break some other commandment. If treating a person the way they want to be treated causes us to break God's commandments, then it is not really good for the other person, but harmful. Love never violates God's commandments. Sometimes people justify breaking God's commandments by appealing to a false definition of love. They say, "But we love each other." Actually, you don't. If you and another person decide you want to violate God's commandment together, that's not love. Not only are you breaking God's commandment, but you are also causing the other person to break God's commandment. God has given us his commandments for our protection. Violating his commandments brings harm to us and those around us. So if another person wants you to do something that will break God's commandment, it is never loving to do it. Listen carefully to what John says in verse 2: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments." How do we love the children of God? And we can expand this to all people. How do we love those around us? By obeying God's commandments. God has commanded the manner in which we should treat those around us. We love them by doing what God has commanded.

## FAITH AND LOVE (1 John 5:1-8)

It's like the family again. Mom and dad make a rule that says, "No jumping on the bed." But your brother wants you to jump on the bed with him. Is it loving to do it? No. Mom and dad made the rule for a reason. You could fall off and get hurt. Your brother could fall off and get hurt. There's a whole song about monkeys that covers this very thing. It is never loving to break our heavenly Father's commandments, even if someone wants us to, and even if we can't see the harm in it. Just because you can't see the harm in something doesn't mean it's not there. We trust that our heavenly Father can see better than we can. So we keep his commandments. This is how we love him, and this is how we love those around us.

This is the doctrine of vocation. I promised we'd unpack that word. *Vocation* comes from a Latin word that means "calling." In English we often confuse vocation with having a job, but that's not right. Some vocations are jobs, but not all of them. Vocations are callings from God. And the very first vocation we have from God is to be a child of God. This is the first thing God calls us. He calls us his own children. And that's where the doctrine of vocation begins. It begins knowing that we are God's beloved children. And then we see all of our other relationships and stations in life as callings from God. Some of us are mothers or fathers. All of us are children. Some are grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, friends, teachers, employees, employers, church members, citizens. And all of us are neighbors. We see all of these stations in life as callings from God. We see the people whom God has placed around us, and these are our closest neighbors. It is these people whom God calls us to love first. This is the doctrine of vocation. First, God calls us his own children, and then we love him by loving those he has placed around us. And we love them by obeying God's commandments.

---

This is the whole Christian life. It consists of two things: *faith* and *love*. Or we can call it *assurance of salvation* and *vocation*. We believe that Jesus died for us and rose again from the dead. This casts out fear. We have confidence in the love of God. We know that his love for us is not based on our love for him. His love for us is perfect. He has manifested this love by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to be the sacrifice for all our sin. This is our faith, and it has overcome the world. Now we are free to love without fear. God is pleased with us for the sake of Jesus Christ, and his commandments become our guide to love. This is the whole Christian life: *faith* and *love*. Amen.

---

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.