

1 John 3:18-24 5Easter Sermon 2024

Dear children, let us love not only with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth. 19This is how we know that we are of the truth and how we will set our hearts at rest in his presence: 20If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God. 22We also receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight. 23This then is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another just as he commanded us. 24The one who keeps his commands remains in God and God in him. This is how we know that he remains in us: We know it from the Spirit, whom he has given to us.

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Surgeon = short term hurt, long term help.

Jesus is greater

God is Love. We are not. Jesus loves us.

Remember the Good Garden Knife of God

This is a knife. (orange handled one) This is a knife in the hands of a surgeon he goes to town. This knife in the hands of a gardener he goes to town. A garden knife is for grape-vines that gardeners use. A knife is featured in the Gospel lesson when Jesus describes God the Father as a gardener. God the gardener has a knife and he knows how to use it. Not only does he know how to use it but he also uses his knife with everyone. The ones who do produce fruit are not exempt from the gardener's knife, but the knife is meant for more.

God is a perfect gardener who knows exactly how to cut, how to prune and how to care. God cares for us first by his Spirit whom he has given to us. The Holy Bible, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion are the only ways that God the Holy Spirit has been given to us according to what God teaches in the Bible. So those ways are good to follow, good to be reminded, and good through them to 'remain connected' to Jesus when he says, "**remain in me.**"

We are branches of God as believers to whom God has reached out his grace and mercy. In the same way God expects his branches to be reaching out in action and truth for the name and the sake of Jesus Christ our Risen Savior. But the question remains, why would John need to say this if it should already be evident in the life of a believer? It isn't so evident because we drop the ball in keeping God's command and remaining in God.

Believers can fail to respect the name of Jesus Christ our Lord when we stay away, when we lack in love, when actions do not match words. Are we tempted to live a lie by which our hearts condemn us? Is what we have done too much? Is who we are too big and full of so much sin that God can't handle our actions, lack of truth, failure in word and tongue? We do not keep God's commands. We do not obey God's laws. We do not give or show love in all the ways God expects. We just don't.

But Jesus does! You can know that you belong to the truth when, with me, we repent. When hearts condemn, believers return to church to say together, "**by what we have done and what we have failed to do**" in the liturgy. The heart of God is greater than our guilty condemning hearts. The heart of God is bigger than us who think we know everything, but we don't. The heart of God is God who is greater and greatest of all. What God says gets done. And Jesus got done what our hearts needed him to do. To have a heart of faith is to love not only with word or with tongue, but also in action and truth.

If we can be honest to admit that we – yes, we have failed to do what God commands perfectly – God is greater than our hearts as he knows everything and in that knowing Jesus was busy dying on the cross. Isaiah 53 says, "**He had no attractiveness and no majesty.**

When we saw him, nothing about his appearance made us desire him.

³He was despised and rejected by men,

a man who knew grief,

who was well acquainted with suffering.

Like someone whom people cannot bear to look at,

he was despised,

and we thought nothing of him."

God who is greater than sinful human hearts knows everything about us. But God's knowing everything about us doesn't stop his heart of love from being greater. God's knowing everything still calls us "**dear Children, and dear friends**"

Jesus says to us through the Apostle John, "let us love not only with word or with out tongue, but also in action and truth." Maybe a quote from Matthew can help us apply what these words mean: "**'Lord, when**

did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or lacking clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ” (Matthew 25:37-)

Action and truth speak for themselves. If we say we are a baseball player then actions and truth show that. If we say we are a mother or father then actions and truth show that. If we say we are believers: then action and truth should show that. We are not perfect in any way – so Jesus is perfect in every way for us.

Perfectly loved by Jesus. Perfectly forgiven by Jesus – doesn’t make us perfect, it makes us forgiven and yet still a mess but still forgiven.

The Apostle John is a dear John kind of believer. He is a good guy who uses terms of endearment with total strangers – but for the fact that they and he have Jesus in common. John says, Dear Children and Dear friends in today’s lesson. John is a hugger, he’s an encourager, he’s a builder of souls by grace through the Spirit whom God has given to him. John is a believer like us who brings God’s forgiveness and encouragement by grace through faith.

He is the neighbor next door who would give the shirt off his back. He is the driver who pulls over to help you fix your flat tire. He is the man at the grocery line who helps you pay that \$5.00 short of money you have for groceries. Jesus is more than John more than you and me.

Dear John is a dear believer, a dear person, a dear Apostle, a dear friend of friends who cares so much because Jesus cares so much for him. John models his faith after the Greatest One who by grace reaches out to him. Jesus says, “**remain in me, and I am going to remain in you.**” (John 15:4) These Bible words bring knowing the Spirit, believing the Spirit and depending on the Spirit of God as **Jesus is Greater.**

God puts faith into our lives. Having faith do we know how to use it, how do we put faith into action and to keep faith in truth? God the Holy Spirit fills us with faith so that we not only have faith, but so also that we produce the fruits of faith God expects. All of the Bible is filled with commands and instructions, warnings and promises, threats and rewards. God is busy bringing His Will to people who need to know that the faith he gives is not passive, faith is active. Children of God “**love not only with word or with tongue, but also in action and truth.**” (3:18)

We as branches connected to Jesus the Vine need to be listening and loving at the same time. When we fail to do either or both of them we fail to believe in the name of his Son, and refuse to love one another as God commands us to do. When we are so busy that we don’t have time to talk, when we are so distracted that we don’t actively listen, when we keep our possessions to ourselves for our own pleasure and fail to share the generous ways that God has blessed us – **remember the good garden knife of God.**

Believers do not live in fear of God’s knife but rather welcome his pruning, cutting and challenging. We hope that God would not test us in the same way as Job but maybe it can be in similar ways. Regardless of the test or the trial – God remains in us by grace through faith. As we stay close to God through repentance and belief God remains in us through faith. The Spirit of God has been given to us to heal, to help, to build up, and to keep us connected to Jesus the Vine by remaining in us through Word and Sacrament.

You have called me as your pastor to convict sinful hearts of our sin. You have called me as your pastor to convince you that God knows everything. You have called me as your pastor to teach how Jesus, who was God’s dearly loved Son was convicted in our place. Now that Jesus has risen from the dead, showing how God is greatest – gives a command in this lesson. (23) “**This then is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another just as he commanded us.**”

We don't do that perfectly – we do that forgiven-ly – as dear children, dear friends of God on high. Jesus commands repentance and that we believe and that we do our forgiven best to love one another as he commands. The Spirit of God fights against daily temptations we face as we remain in God by his Word and Sacraments. God by his Word and Sacraments 'remains in us.'

Jesus is Greater than our hearts. Jesus is the One who forgives. Jesus is the One who loves. He is the One whose heart is the greatest of all knowing what we need the most. The Gospel good news of God. Jesus is greater as your Dear Friend. Jesus is greater as God prunes believers for their good. Short term hurt, long term help is in the name of the Lord. **Remember the Good Garden Knife of God.**