

“Hereby We Do Know That We Know Him”

I John 2:3-11, April 25, 2010

Jubilate Sunday (“Make a joyful noise”)

Beloved of the Lord.....Spring is the most wonderful of seasons. Out of a cold and dead winter, God’s creation suddenly “springs” to life. The grass turns green, the trees bud and break forth with new leaves, many flowers begin to bloom. It is a time of new life and fruitfulness. Because God long ago by His Word commanded His creation to “be fruitful and multiply”, creation has been doing so for 6000 years. His Word alone continues to uphold all things until He returns the second time, to judge the quick and the dead.

In a similar manner, it is the Gospel Word which creates the “springtime of our life”, our sanctification, holiness of life. Whereas the Holy Spirit by the Gospel first gives us the faith to believe “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”, God’s justification of us through Christ cannot but help to burst forth and blossom with newness of life and a willing heart that happily obeys God’s commands. “Love is the fulfilling of the law”. Our text therefore teaches us today what we might call a secondary proof that we are God’s children, namely we know that we know Him “if we keep His commandments.”

I. The first and second proof that we know Him. We speak today primarily of both faith and good works. Good works are not faith itself, but they proceed forth from faith. In verse one of this chapter John therefore writes, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” John is saying DON’T SIN, but if you do slip or unwillingly yield, do not despair for Jesus is your Advocate, a Friend of Sinners. His blood continually declares you clean before the throne of God. “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.” His propitiation means His sacrifice on the cross has gained for you and all sinners God’s divine favor, His “good will toward men.” Thus when you ask that question, “Am I a true believer? Am I a true and real Christian?” there is that inward testimony of the Holy Spirit, namely faith which answers and says, “Yes I am, for I believe and trust that God through the blood of my Christ has really forgiven me all my sins.” Faith within assents to, agrees with, faith knows and trusts Christ to be his Redeemer from sin. Thus the first proof that we are true believers is simply the faith which testifies within. It is faith that says, “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

God’s justification of all men through Christ then takes place outside and apart of us in the heart of God, yet it is a judgment for us, a good verdict, the slamming down of the gavel in our eternal favor – “Thy sins be forgiven thee, go in peace.” Where the Holy Spirit works such faith in the heart, there is a change of direction within, a reformation of life. “If any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away, behold all things become new.” Faith cannot but help to blossom. Romans 6:22 says, “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God ye have your fruit unto holiness.” Sin does not nor can not rule the believer in Christ, for Christ Himself lives in our heart by faith. Though sin is ever present with us, it does not have the rule, for Christ is our Master whom we willingly serve. Holiness of life then is primarily at work in two ways: FIRST we resist and fight against sin within and without us, SECOND our will now agrees with God’s will. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.”

After the inward testimony of Holy Spirit by faith, there is what might be called a secondary proof that we are the children of God: “Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.” Obedience to God’s commandments is a secondary proof to us that we are indeed true Christians and not false. We know that we know Christ, if we obey His Ten commandments. True love for God and obedience to God’s commandments go hand in hand. No one can claim to love God, yet at the same time daily live contrary to His commands. Kretzmann writes, “If we live in accordance with the commands of this heavenly Father, if we do what His holy will desires of us, then we may take this fact as evidence that we possess the proper knowledge of God.” Believers will obey the sixth commandment and be faithful to their spouse. Believing fathers and mothers will raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Believers will humbly accept their trials and tribulations, for we set our affections on the things above and not on the things of this world. Believers will not hold a grudge, but happily forgive others as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven them.

Yet in all these things let us understand our obedience to God’s commandments is never done perfectly with true and perfect love of heart. Our best works still contain much sin and are largely unholy, but through Christ they are counted as holy. Rev. McLaughlin writes, “Strive as we may to increase in sanctification, it remains imperfect in this life. Justification is always perfect, admitting of no degrees; but sanctification is progressive. Holiness of life is not the same in all believers; not even in the same person does it always continue on the same level.” We might bloom today but tomorrow behave like thorns. Though

we all desire to be roses, too often we find we are dandelions. Yet even a dandelion is precious in the sight of a child – how much more in the eyes of Him who loved us before the foundation of the world? Christ is our constant rose. As Christians we know in this world we will never be perfect, but that doesn't stop us from wanting to be like Jesus. Because we love Jesus we "press toward the mark." Paul writes, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

II. Those who say they know Him but do not. Now, in order that no Christian be deceived John writes, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Thus when a person confesses to be a Christian, but they are impenitent fornicators, impenitent adulterers, impenitent thieves, if they continually hate and hold a grudge in their heart, if they are continually proud and never humble, such cannot be a true Christian but are rather hypocrites. "He that hatheth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth." Thus dear true and repentant Christian, don't let any false Christian deceive you so that you become a hypocrite too. If they are living quite contrary to God's commands yet confessing Christ, don't think you can live quite contrary to God's commands yet confess Christ. Also be not highminded but fear. The difference between a Christian and non-Christian is not the sin nor the amount of sin, but it is a matter of faith and unbelief. Christians confess their sin, and trust and believe Christ is their Savior. Unbelievers deny their sin, and deny Christ to be their Savior. They also cross their fingers regarding heaven, though we know heaven through Christ is surely our home. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

III. "Love one another, as I have loved you." "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him." God's love is perfected among us when we keep His Word. Therefore, "Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, *be* subject to *your* masters with all fear." In all things Christ is always the model of our behavior. "He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, as HE walked." Dear Christian, God wants you to walk in the same way and manner of Jesus. Therefore read the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and learn how Jesus lived. As a boy Jesus loved God's Word and

was found in the temple both hearing the Word and asking the teachers questions. As a Man Jesus looked with compassion upon all men. He was a Good Samaritan, a Faithful Shepherd to all. Though His own disciples time and again behaved like little squabbling children, He patiently taught them their sin through the Word. When the disciples were proud, the LORD served them by washing their feet. When the disciples were sorry for their sins He said, "He that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." If then you want to know how to live for Jesus dear Christian, do as Jesus did, and love as Jesus loved. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."

John, the writer of our Epistle today, heard these words from Jesus' own lips. In one breathe John writes, "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment." In the next breathe John says, "Again a new commandment I write unto you." What does this mean? On the one hand God's commandments are nothing new to us. We have known them from childhood – Thou shalt, and Thou shalt not. But on the side of the Gospel "behold, all things are new", we see everything in a different light, even God's commandments. The Gospel teaches us that Jesus with love came to fulfill all those commandments we have broken, in our stead, in our place. The Gospel teaches us all those commandments we have broken, were laid upon Jesus on the cross, as if He had broken them, in our stead, in our place. Moreover the Gospel through Christ teaches us, "Thy sins be forgiven thee, go in peace", hence "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." Christ is that new light who shines into our heart by faith. Through Christ we now see God in heaven as He is – not a stern and angry God with a frown, but a gracious God with a smile. Even now through Christ His face is shining upon us and is gracious unto us. Seeing Him as He is, our Savior, MY SAVIOR, God's commandments suddenly become new. They are no longer conditions and obligations, but they are our "means", our way of showing Him our love. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Dear Christian, every time you by love keep His commandments you are saying, "Lord Thee I love with all my heart." Every time you by love keep His commandments you are also saying to the world, "Dear world, I have a Savior. I know Jesus to be my Friend. Jesus is your friend to." Amen.