

CONFESS THE CONNECTION
FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 JN 4:1-16
MAY 3, 2015

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. ⁴ Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Ignaz Semmelweis was doctor in Vienna in mid 1800s.

He worked in one of two maternity hospitals
established to train doctors and midwives.

He noticed women at one training doctors died of fever
at much higher rate than one training only midwives,
higher even than women who gave birth in street
rather than enter that hospital because they noticed too.

He wondered if it may have to do with one of few differences:
doctors were also learning to perform autopsies
so he tried having them wash smell of dead bodies off hands
and rate of death by fever dropped to none.

But other doctors refused to believe hand washing
had anything to do with it & he was driven out of position.
He tried so hard to convince others washing made difference
& was so unsuccessful, he became furious.

He was thought to be mad and was committed to asylum
where he was beaten by guards & died in two weeks.

A few years later Louise Pasteur proved existence of germs.

Point is importance of recognizing connections
even when others don't seem able to see them.

Jesus in today's reading from Gospel of John illustrates
importance of our remaining connected to him.

These words from Johns letter also points out
essential connections that are not always seen.

TRUE FAITH CONNECTS US TO GOD

ALL TRUE TEACHING CONNECTS TO JESUS CHRIST

FAITH IN GOD IS CONNECTED TO LOVING OTHERS

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has given us of his Spirit.

First connection we need to recognize is connection of
spirituality with faith in true God who gives spirit.

What John calls "the world" is very interested today

in spirituality: aspect of life that is not just physical,
which affects our having peace, hope, joy, etc.

but is very popular to be spiritual without being religious,
holding to particular system of beliefs & behaviors.

Even some atheists have found value in worship-like gatherings
with fellowship, songs & readings

and many try to imitate true prayer with meditation

Being spiritual is like having an appetite.

Good appetite keeps you from becoming physically weak.

Being religious is like having a particular diet,

like balanced diet of meat, grains, fruits & vegetables,
or being vegetarian or paleolithic or whatever.

It is important for health to have both good diet & good appetite.

You can have good appetite without having good diet.

just eat whatever looks & tastes good, but is not healthy.

You are better off with good diet even without good appetite.

Many today have good spiritual appetite but pay little attention to whether or not they have a good spiritual diet.

They just believe whatever sounds good or feels good.

May even believe things that are mutually contradictory without worrying about whether it is objectively true simply because that is what they like to believe.

The problem with generic spirituality is failure to recognize the germ of sin which carries death to those seeking life.

John says there are many false prophets in the world.

That is more true than ever.

John warns about the antichrist. That is no political figure as some imagine but a religious figure.

Watch out for false religion.

So he says to test the spirits to see if they are really from God.

The devil is spiritual as well.

If you open door to spirituality in general without watching what kind of spirituality, guess who will come walking in.

In confirmation instruction, students took tests.

Now it is time for the, and all rest of us, to do testing.

The true God has given us of his Spirit. He did this in baptism with water & word. It is word that causes faith in God.

It is the same Spirit that inspired word of God in Bible.

To stay connected to this one true God we need this Spirit to keep guiding us to understand the truths of this word.

Nothing in the world can sustain real spiritual life outside of the word that connects us to God.

Connected to this is John's next point:

ALL TRUE TEACHING CONNECTS TO JESUS CHRIST

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At time John wrote this, there was teacher named Cerenthus
Who taught that it is impossible for God to die on cross,
so there was a man, Jesus,
and the eternal Christ entered into him until he died.
John says, no, Jesus Christ is one person, both God & man,
the son of God in the flesh, God remaining in him.
This is the only way for him to be our savior
who can be innocent and yet die in our place,
and not just for us but for the whole world.
The real God, Jesus, has come in the flesh
to deal with the real problems of sinful flesh.
Jesus' incarnation & his role as our savior is heart of gospel.
His death & resurrection is only way we have forgiveness,
of sins which separate us from God, the source of life.
Only his blood is able to wash away the germs of sin.
Wise consumers wanting real food learn to read labels.
If main ingredient, listed first on label,
is something like sugar, be careful about eating it.
Look even more carefully at any teaching, sermon, or song
If what God does for us through Jesus
is not main ingredient, be careful what you swallow.
This leads some to another dangerous disconnect.
They may say as long as you believe in Jesus,
nothing else matters, doctrine is not really that important.
Actually opposite is true. Because Jesus is heart of gospel,
every other doctrine (means: teaching) is connected to him.
Like center of spider web, touch any part & it is felt there.
The Christian faith is like a river system: poison or pollution
of a small tributary eventually leads to the main river.
In movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding", father says, "Give me
a word, any word, I will show it comes from Greek."
Christian doctrine, any doctrine, is connected to Christ.
Power of baptism to genuinely give new life
is because it is baptism into Christ.
Real presence of Christ's body in Holy Communion
is because he is still both God & man with a body.
Marriage of man & woman is a picture of relationship
of Christ & church. so redefining marriage
implies different kind of relationship with Christ.
Old Testament scriptures are as true as Jesus' word
which said they are true,

and if this can't be believed,
then nothing about Jesus can be believed.
We can't confess Christ and deny what he says.
because it is only through his word that we receive his gifts.
Devaluing teachings that don't appear at first glance
to be directly connected to salvation through Jesus
may come from failure to recognize another connection.

FAITH IN GOD IS CONNECTED TO LOVING OTHERS

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¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Another of the ideas of this world is that since we need to
all get along with each other and love one another,
we need to ignore or at least keep quiet about
differing teachings & beliefs that seem to divide us.
Again, John says the opposite. He calls those he is warning
to avoid false teaching, "Beloved"
it is because they are loved that he says what he does.
He goes directly from importance of faith in real Jesus
and discerning the spirit of truth and error
to talking about sincere love for others.
He is not changing the subject, he is showing that the two
are intimately connected.
Genuine love, not just pretending to care about others,
comes from knowing and believing truth of God.
God most certainly loves us dearly.
He also most certainly hates sin and untruths.
Why? because they are bad for us and always hurt us
and separate us from him who loves us.
This is why God doesn't ignore sin or false belief,
saying, "That's OK, it doesn't matter." It does matter!

This is why Jesus came to do something about it,
to separate us, whom he loves, from our sin he hates,
to take away our sin by giving us faith in the truth.

Greatest obstacle to genuine love is not intolerance
but self centered sin which says I don't care about you
so I don't care what you do or what you believe.
It doesn't make a difference. I don't care if you go to hell.
But love says I do care. I care enough to do something
that does make a difference.

Abiding in the truth doesn't call for us to hate others,
instead it calls for us to love others as God loved us,
with genuine tough love that does what it takes to save
people from danger to both body and soul.

God loves us and we are to show love for others, not just in
first article ways, with food, clothing, shelter
but also in second article ways as Jesus does, with
risky self sacrifice for those who are inclined to reject us
and so also in third article ways as the Spirit does,
with forgiveness of sin and sharing the truth.

As John says, no one can see God directly,
but we show what God is really like by showing
what his love is really like, not ignoring sin & error
but doing what it takes to put an end to it.

Avoiding whatever may make others uncomfortable or unhappy
with us is not really love for them but caring about ourselves.

True love takes great boldness, but God gives us this courage
because perfect love - for God and others - drives out fear.

When we really believe in God and his love for us,
we are moved to love others in the same way.

In Gospel reading, Jesus calls us to remain connected to him,
the true vine who is our source of life.

In these verses also, John calls us to abide/remain in God,
so he shows us how we are connected to him.

TRUE FAITH CONNECTS US TO GOD

Test the spirits that are of this world because there is
no genuine spirituality apart from faith in the true God.

ALL TRUE TEACHING CONNECTS TO JESUS CHRIST

His coming in the flesh to die for us and rise again
is the heart of the Christian faith

And every other truth taught in God's word
is connected to this essential and central truth.

FAITH IN GOD IS CONNECTED TO LOVING OTHERS

All the truths in God's word work together to give us
confidence in his true love for us,
and it is confidence in his love that enables us to fearlessly
have genuine love for others.

it is God himself, Jesus' death and resurrection
and the work of the Holy Spirit who causes
both this faith and this love to abide in us forever.