

“Love is Impossible Without Faith; Believing is Impossible Without Love”

1 John 4:19

June 14, 2020

SERMON 1919

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Our sermon text is from 1 John 4:19, “We love Him because He first loved us.”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith and love go together. Now we do have to keep the correct order: Faith first, then love. We are saved by faith in Christ alone. Nevertheless, faith produces love.

In the Athanasian Creed from last week, the emphasis upon faith for salvation is repeated several times.

--This creed begins, “Whoever will be saved shall, above all else, hold the catholic faith. Which faith, except everyone keeps whole and undefiled, without doubt he will perish.” With faith there is salvation, without faith perishing.

--About half-way through it says, “Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe faithfully the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Once again salvation requires faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became true man to atone for our sins.

--And finally the last sentence of the creed says, “This is the catholic faith which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.” Belief in Jesus Christ saves. Without faith, a person cannot be saved.

Nevertheless, toward the end of the Creed it describes what happens on Judgment Day saying “from whence he{Jesus} will come to judge the living and the dead.” **If you are not paying close attention, the second- and third-to-last sentences can leave you a bit confused.** These sentences describe Judgment Day, saying, “At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies and will give an account of their own works. And they that have done good will go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.”

These sentences are not teaching a salvation by works, though they do speak about the works which will be brought up on judgment day. Faith cannot be seen so works are used to show who has faith and who doesn't. Thus faith in Christ saves, but the works shown on judgment day reveal who had faith.

Think of Jesus' story concerning the sheep and the goats. On Judgment Day way before any works are even mentioned, all people are divided into sheep and goats. The sheep are believers and the goats are the unbelievers. The good works, brought up on judgment day, show which ones were believers and which weren't. Even more telling is that the sins of believers are never mentioned on judgment day. The believers have their sins forgiven, while unbelievers have nothing but sins revealed. Did the unbelievers have anything good brought up on judgment day? No. The Scriptures declare in Hebrews 10, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” You see, nothing

which an unbeliever does is considered a good work, because they do not have faith. Without faith it is impossible to love God or the neighbor.

Consider the good work of going to church. A believer goes to church out of thankfulness for the salvation they have received freely through faith in Jesus Christ. God loved them in forgiving them, and now they wish to give God thanks and praise by receiving His forgiveness in Word and Sacrament. They do not fear God's wrath, but rejoice in His love.

When **an unbeliever** goes to church it is not a fruit of faith.

--An unbeliever might go to church to make his wife happy. That's not a good work; he is just trying to brown nose his wife.

--Or he may go to church so that others think well of him. That's also not a good work. Either he is trying to be a people pleaser, or at worst he is attempting to fool others into thinking he is a believer when he isn't.

--Lastly, and this is the worst of reasons. If an unbeliever goes to church in order to try to earn God's favor, that is the most offensive stinking work in God's eyes. The heavenly Father out of great love sent His Son to suffer and die to atone for his sins. Trying to earn forgiveness is to reject God's love in Christ. It says to God, "I don't care about Your love in Jesus. I don't want forgiveness. I'll do it myself."

Thus, you see that without faith it is impossible to do a truly good work.

Similarly, without faith it is impossible to truly love either God or your neighbor. Love is a fruit of faith. Without faith, no love. Love is that which is done out of thankfulness for the love which God has shown to you. Today's Epistle says, "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). Later it says, "We love Him because He first loved us" (v.19). The believer in Jesus Christ abides in God and thus the believer truly does love God.

Today's Epistle not only speaks of love, but also mentions judgment day as well. Those who know the love of God in Jesus, know just exactly what they will get when Christ returns. They do not fear. They will be welcomed into heaven, because faith in Christ saves. Verse 17 says, "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 John 4:17-18).

The Holy Gospel for today is from St. Luke chapter 16. Jesus tells a story about a certain rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. This story is an illustration or example of an unbeliever who had no love and a poor believer who trusted in God's love for him and abided in God's love.

The rich man's lack of faith and love is seen in his neglect of Lazarus. Though the rich man had everything in abundance, he refused to give Lazarus even the crumbs or scraps from his table. This rich man had an idol and it was mammon. Though the rich man had the word of God, described as Moses and the Prophets, he did not pay attention to it. Oh, yes, he paid great attention to his fine clothing of purple and fine linen. He made sure that he had sumptuous meals every day. However, the rich man did not attend to the Word of God. He did not care about the free love of God, and thus he was not thankful or loving.

The heavenly Father wished that this rich man would know about His great love in sending His Son to rescue from suffering and death. Yet, this unbeliever gave no

time to love God or his neighbor. I'm sure that the rich man said that he loved God. But that was a lie. 1 John 4:20, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

In this story Lazarus has no offering to give. Lazarus is sick and full sores. Lazarus must rely on others for his food. Nevertheless, this poor beggar had faith in God. He trusted in the love of God through Jesus Christ. Lazarus listened to the Word of God, which is called Moses and the Prophets. Lazarus trusted that he was saved by faith and gave thanks to God with all his heart. Faith and love go together.

Lazarus was saved by faith. When he died, Lazarus was with Abraham that great man of faith, who trusted in Jesus Christ. Although we should expect Lazarus to have done good works of love, in this story Lazarus is prevented by his sick and poor condition from doing any. Thus, we see that faith alone saves.

At the end of today's Epistle, we see why the believer is expected to do good works of love toward his brother. 1 John 4:21 says, "And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also." Our loving God who saved us through faith in His Son and has commanded us to love our brother. When our thankfulness for God's love inspires us to give thanks, we ask, "What shall I do?" Shall I build you a church? Shall I buy you a statue? Shall I offer you some masses? God's answer is simple, "Love your neighbor."

The Triune God doesn't need our goods or service or sacrifice. However, our neighbor is in need of our love. If you fear and love God, then live a life of love toward your neighbor. Today's Gradual from Psalm 41 says, "Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble."

You might remember Jesus saying at one point, "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good..." (Mark 14:7a). The Lord places a Lazarus at our gate. He desires that we make use of our faith to show them some fruit of faith. You have received the love of God, now show that love to the Lazarus, which I have sent to you. You know that Jesus has given you life, because He has risen from the dead. Now give your life away in service to your brother and neighbor.

Last week, we heard the Epistle from Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" The rich man in today's story did not figure out the judgments and ways of God. He looked for God in His purple robes and worldly possessions, and thought that he had found Him. He sought Life in his sumptuous eating and living. The rich man spurned the poor and lowly. He thought God had rejected this beggar because of his poverty and sickness. He considered the wounds of poor Lazarus to be an impediment to achieving greatness before God.

Why did the rich man think this way? It was because He had rejected God's Word in the books of Moses and the Prophets. With only human reason and without the revelation of God, God's ways are "past finding out." Therefore, this rich man didn't know the love which the Father was bestowing through His Son. He didn't know that eternal life was a gift freely given. He didn't know that he should have had faith in God and loved his neighbor Lazarus.

In contrast, Father Abraham did listen to God's Word and trusted in the Lord as his shield and exceedingly great reward. Abraham looked forward to the promised offspring, the heir who would come and bring salvation. That offspring would be Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Father's love would offer us Jesus. In perfect love, Jesus would offer Himself to live a perfect life and suffer and die to take away our sins. Today's Old Testament makes it clear, "And he{Abraham} believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

My Christian friends, you have the Word of God. Listen to it. Confess your sins. Trust in Christ. And then, love your neighbor. Having been made bold by the love of God in Jesus Christ, love your brother and neighbor. "Faith saves and unbelief damns" (Luther's Works v.78, p.61). And faith produces the fruit of faith: love.