



## **Christ Lutheran Church**

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

**Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!**

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

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### ***“Believing and Testifying to the Water, Blood and Spirit”***

#### ***1<sup>st</sup> John 5:1-8***

*6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – May 6, 2018 – Confirmation Sunday*

**Pastor Chip Winter**

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Epistle appointed for the day and already read for us from the fifth chapter of St. John's first epistle.

My dear family in Christ, we are again at the first weekend in May, which signals for Christ Lutheran both the Plant Sale and Confirmation Sunday. Many of us have bought new, young plants out at the Pohlman Ag complex. We have taken them home and replanted many of them. Those plants are now cared for in a new setting where they receive continued attention – watering and feeding – to help them to grow and flourish.

Something analogous is taking place with our confirmands. They have already begun their growth in Christ Jesus years ago in their baptism. That's where the seed of faith in Christ Jesus was planted. For the last few years they've been studying the faith more intently. And now, they are moving into a new chapter of their life of faith. They are moving into a more adult, a more mature understanding of their faith where they are to continue to grow and flourish as dearly loved children of God. No longer in the “greenhouse” of childhood, there are somewhat different challenges in this

new environment, but the same loving, creating, redemptive and all-powerful God goes with them in His Word to guide and to prosper them.

A casual reading of the text before us puts “**the Spirit, and the water and the blood**” before us. Those can remind us of the emphasis on Word and Sacrament that is part of confirmation instruction – the Spirit at work, bringing the blood of Jesus to be part of Holy Communion and comprehending water and connecting it to God’s Word for Baptism’s lavish washing away of all sin. But more on that later.

Where John starts in this text is the emphasis on our loving God the Father and thereby (1) loving the Son He has brought into the world, Christ Jesus. Of course, we love this Son Who has offered Himself as the sacrifice to take away the sin of the world. We praise God for our forgiveness and the new and everlasting life that is ours in Him.

But then John goes further with the understanding that when you love the Father you are also (2) to love those who inhabit His house. That would be a common understanding, wouldn’t it? Jami and I love Mike and Kathy. By extension, we love their son Nate and his wife, Ally, their daughter Ammon and her husband Troy, their son Ben and his wife, Melissa, their daughter and our god-daughter, Abby, and their foster child, Mekeda. Likewise, Mike and Kathy love our Mary and her husband, Dave, our Chase and his wife, Krista. You have the same experiences in your circles, too.

But, if it were easy to love those who live in the household of the Father, St. John wouldn’t need to remind us. We are a stubborn and at times intractable people. But faith in God is bent on moving us into loving all whom God has redeemed to Himself – as well as those not yet accepting that gift of redemption.

Another reminder for all of our confirmands and those of us living in our post-confirmation years: we are called, as we love God and love His people, (3) to live for His instruction (v. 3). We are not only to keep on learning but to embrace that learning.

This, too, is challenged in this sinful world and made a necessity by this sinful world. In 1 John 2:16 we find a list of categories of the temptations to sin that are common to humankind: **16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.** As we look a bit more closely, those categories can be used not only to describe the weakness of our own flesh, but how sin entered into the world to begin with – these were the places where Eve fell, with Adam following. The forbidden fruit was **good for food**, a **delight to the eyes** and **desirable for making one wise**.

Thankfully, those categories were represented in the temptation of our Lord Jesus – and He remained obedient through all of them on our behalf. Jesus did not falter when Satan tempted Him to **turn stones into bread**, to **rule over the kingdoms of the world**, or to prove that He was **so valuable to God's plan** that God would not allow Jesus to die, casting Himself down from the Temple. Jesus prevails in obedience, so that He can make that one, perfect sacrifice for the sins of all.

Another growing challenge became apparent the week before last. The ubiquitous and powerful Google has denied advertising to Concordia Publishing House (CPH), the publishing branch for the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. Their rationale for refusing to run CPH ads? **“(Because) of the faith we express on our website.”** explained CPH CEO Bruce Kintz. Confirmants and all, our faith is under increasing attack!

In the face of this and myriad opponents like it, St. John rallies us with the understanding that **“...everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”** And this faith is founded in the One Who comes by

the water and the blood – that which flowed from our crucified Savior’s side when His death on the cross was verified by the spear’s piercing. It is Jesus’ death and resurrection for us which gives us not only forgiveness and life eternal, but victory over the evil in this present age.

It is in the water of the Baptism John instigated that we were welcomed into the family of God. This baptism was begun with John, but his was simply one of repentance. The baptism the confirmands and you and I have undergone is the one enlarged and empowered by the blood that Jesus ultimately shed on the cross to pay the price for all humankind’s sin. That’s why John writes **“...not by the water, only, but by the water and the blood.”** It is Jesus’ blood which makes guarantees baptism’s significant offer.

And then St. John adds one more phrase for us to ponder. **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.** The Water and the blood were strange enough, but I think we’ve got that. Now we add the Spirit? What does this mean? Where does this come from?

It probably arises from St. John’s understanding of what constitutes a rock-solid witness to the truth. In Deuteronomy 19:5 we read **“A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”** Such a testimony is established; it’s credible, reliable.

It was a long time ago that these young men and women were brought to the baptismal font by their parents and in the company of their sponsors. They are coming to bear witness to what God gave them in their baptism – these young men and women whose confession we will confirm, in effect saying **“Yes, you know the truth! Welcome aboard!”** – they have been on the receiving end of the water of Holy Baptism, where God invited them to faith. Their little, germinated seed of

faith was founded on the blood that Jesus the Christ shed for their forgiveness of sins. And that sacrament was enlivened by the Holy Spirit, the One Who has brought to all of us that victorious faith: a faith that overcomes the world, a faith that loves our Father in heaven, a faith that adores His only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus, and a faith that is for all of our days to be lived out in love for all those who do or will inhabit the house of our heavenly Father by His Grace. Amen.