

A Demonstrative Faith

1 John 5:1-5

Sermon 5/6 in a Series on 1 John

In this morning's passage, St. John teaches us that genuine faith demonstrates itself in the life of the believer in three particular ways. Faith demonstrates itself in genuine love, obedience and victory. Before we look at these three effects of faith we need to back up to verse 1 where John teaches us that the Christian faith has a distinctive and irreducible content. The first part of verse one and the last part of verse five show us what this content is. Christians believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He was sent into the world for a specific work. Throughout this letter John has been identifying the nature of the work Jesus came to do.

In 1:7 he says Jesus was anointed to cleanse us from sin: “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

In 2:2 John affirms that Jesus saves us from the wrath of God: “and he is the atoning sacrifice (propitiation) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

In 4:10 John tells us that by his dying on the Cross Jesus demonstrates God's love for us: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

In 5:11-12 we are told why John has written this letter: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Jesus came into the world ultimately so that through him we might have eternal life. This is a quality of life that begins when we come to faith in Jesus and is demonstrated by how now.

Therefore John says when we believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God there are three ways in which this faith will be demonstrated.

The first is in genuine love, the second is obedience and the third is in victory.

Genuine Love: At the end of verse 1 John writes: “everyone who loves the parent

loves the child. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God.”

It is important to note that what motivates our love for our Christian brothers and sisters is our love for God. This means we will love our brothers and sisters in a particular way. Our actions toward them will arise, not out of our personal feelings toward them, but out of our love for God and our desire to obey his Word. In other words, when love is expressed by righteousness, then we can be confident that it is really love.

This might mean that we will have to have a conversation with someone and tell them things they do not want to hear. Why? Because we are motivated by our love for God.

Think of the way Jesus loved Peter. He told him that on the night of his, Jesus' arrest, Peter would deny Jesus three times. Peter couldn't hear this hard word at the time and it was only after his denial that he remembered what Jesus had said and really heard it for the first time.

Sometimes love must do the unpleasant thing. If it is an unpleasant thing that is being done because it is prompted by love of God and obedience to his commandments, well then, it is love, even though it makes someone angry, or upsets them temporarily.

Obedience: John goes on to say that genuine faith will be demonstrated by our willingness to grow in obeying God. “For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” It is important to remember that in his Gospel St. John records this commandment of Jesus' “A new commandment I give you that you love one another as I have loved you.” To obey God involves allowing Jesus to love us. As we live our life from this centre then we will want to love others with this kind of love. This means that we will be open to hearing the truth about ourselves in ways that will assist us in maturing in Christ. Then in turn we will be able to love others enough to help them do the same. This is in large measure what obedience is.

John says that God's commandments are not burdensome. This is an important choice of language. Notice he does not say God's commandments are easy. They are not. To grow in the way Jesus wants us to is no easy matter. It is never an easy thing to love people in the way God's wants us to. So when John says that God's commandments

are not burdensome it will help to remember the following:

It is the way of God never to lay a commandment on anyone without giving them the strength to carry it out. With vision comes power as the Holy Spirit enables us to carry out what is commanded. There is a second great truth here. Our response to God is to be the response of love. Things that we would never do for a stranger we will willingly do for a loved one. Something that would be an impossible sacrifice, if a stranger demanded it, becomes a willing sacrifice when love needs it.

Therefore as we are growing in knowing God's love and growing in loving him his commandments are not a burden but a privilege and an opportunity to show our love.

Victory: Our faith is demonstrated by genuine love, obedience and thirdly by victory. At verse 4 John writes: “for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.”

When John speaks of the world in this verse he is referring to the world apart from God.

The world in opposition to God. As he looks to Jesus John says we can conquer the world? Why is this?

As we know, in Jesus God entered into this world. God cares for us enough to have taken on the limitations of humanity. God chose to share in the many different activities of human life and knows the various trials, temptations and sorrows of the world first hand. It means that everything that happens to us is understood by God and he is in the business of living along side of us. Faith in the incarnation is the conviction that God cares and God shares. Once we possess this kind of faith certain things follow:

i) We have the defense to resist the infections of the world: On all sides there is the pressure of worldly standards and motives; on all sides there is a fascination with things that corrupt us and diminish us. From within and from without come the temptations that are part of the human situation in a world and a society not interested in and is oftentimes hostile to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But once we are aware of the constant presence of Jesus we have a strong protection against the infections of the world. It is a fact of experience that goodness is easier in the company of good people. If we believe in the incarnation, we have the continual

presence of God in Jesus Christ.

ii) We have the strength to stand up to the attacks of the world: The human situation is full of things which seek to undermine our faith. There are the sorrows and the perplexities of life; there are the disappointments and frustrations of life; there are the failures and discouragements of life. But if we believe in the incarnation, we believe in a God who himself went through all this, even to the cross. He can therefore help others who are going through the same kind of challenges.

iii) We have the indestructible hope of final victory: The world did its worst to Jesus. It relentlessly pursued him and slandered him. It branded him a heretic and a friend of sinners. It judged him, crucified him and buried him. It did everything humanly possible to eliminate him - and it failed. After the cross came the resurrection; after the shame came the glory. If we believe in the incarnation we always have Christ the Victor with us to make us victorious.

A captain of a ship described what it was like to go through a storm. He described the ship in the midst of mountainous seas, the waves mounting on every side, and the wind blowing hard with the pitiless rain coming down. The ship seemed a helpless victim of the storm, caught up in the power of these mighty elements that are raging on every side. Its doom seemed sure. But he said, "I stood there on the bridge of the ship and I grasped the railing. I could feel the throb, throbbing of the engines deep down inside the hull. The storm, the wind, and the waves seemed to be saying to the ship, 'You cannot come, you cannot come.' But I heard the answering throb of the engines saying, 'Yes, we shall, yes, we shall, yes, we shall.' And so we did."

In a similar way this is how we overcome the world. Our faith in Christ is like the answering throb of the engines that gives us the courage to move ahead when faced by the storms of the world.

If we give in, if we reflect the same attitudes as the world, if our actions are the same as those of who do not have faith in Jesus Christ we have succumbed to the world, we are victims of it. We have succumbed to the wiles of the devil. We have lost our testimony, and all possible power to witness. But if our dependence is on the life of the Son of God, moment by moment, his life is in us then, "this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." Who is it that overcomes the world? It is the person who continues to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. The Anointed One, the

Strong One, the One who could say to his disciples, “be of good cheer; I have overcome the world,” {John 16:33b KJV}.

God grant that our faith may be strong in him so that we can demonstrate this faith by genuine love, obedience and victory.