

He Lives in Us

Sermon based on 1 John 3:18-24

In Bo Giertz's book, "The Hammer of God," he tells the story of a young Swedish pastor named Savonius. He tells how once, in the middle of the night and in the dead of winter he is called to minister to a dying man named Johannes. After a long and difficult trip he arrives at the simple home of the dying man. He is greeted by the family gathered together and goes in to speak with Johannes. As he enters the room Savonius is surprised to find a frail man lying in bed who is terrified of his impending death. As Savonius speaks with the man he is told that Johannes is afraid to meet God. Savonius, trying to comfort him, reminds him of the good things he has done in life. But as Johannes lies on his death bed and with perspiration appearing on his face, all he can recount is how many times he has not followed God but instead has fled the other way. The young pastor Savonius does his best to show this young man that God is good and that God is love. Hearing this Johannes struggles to raise himself closer to the preacher and with terror in his voice says that,

"This is exactly the problem. God is good. God is love. But I am none of these things. I have done evil to my neighbors and have hated my fellow man. Why would God want to spend eternity with me?"

Savonius is now speechless. Maybe it was his inexperience or the late hour but he has no comfort to give this man who doesn't believe that God would ever want to live with him. But it is one of Johannes' young nieces who reminds him that God living in us has nothing to do with us and has everything to do with God. God loved us first so much that he sent his one and only Son that whoever believes in him will be saved. With this message that his salvation does not depend on him but only on the work of God, Johannes is changed. He is now different. He is at peace, no longer fears his death.

Johannes was not the first to point out that he did not always feel like a saint who deserved heaven. There have been any number of Christians and non-Christians alike who have pointed out that the people who profess that they know God have done some terrible things. And we are not exempt. It doesn't take a very close look at our past to realize that there have been some very terrible sins in our lives. And so it's a reasonable question to ask as Johannes did, "How can a good and loving God live with people who have done things that are not good or loving. Things he has commanded us not to do?" But just like Johannes young niece we are told it is because of Jesus. With our celebration of Easter we know that the grave is forever empty and that God has accepted Jesus' suffering and death as payment for our sins. We are no longer God's enemy but God's friend. He lives in us.

And because God lives in us we are a completely different person. The apostle John in his letter tells us about the changes that have taken place in us. And he really points out two specific characteristics of the life of a Christian, someone that Christ lives in. John writes that we are to love not only in words but also in action, and he also says that we are to ask God for anything we want.

He begins this section of his letter by saying, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth." Because we belong to

the truth, because of what Christ has done, we are now different. Because God lives in us we will love with actions and truth, not just with empty words.

Jesus told his disciples the parable of two sons. One who when his Father asked him to work in the vineyard said, "Yes, I will go," but changed his mind and instead stayed home. The Father asks the other son to work in his vineyard. He says, "No, I will not go," but he also changes his mind and instead decides to go and work for his father. When Jesus asked his disciples who did the will of their Father the answer is obvious to everyone. And the disciples correctly pointed out that it was the one who did what the Father asked.

Because God now lives in us we are the son who does what the Father asks. We are not someone who sits in the pews on Sunday morning and says, "Yes God, I will follow all your commands." And then throughout the week cares nothing for them. No, instead we are the doers. We put into practice what God says. Our new lives through baptism strengthen us to believe in him and to follow his commands with love.

But you may say, "If this is the test then does God truly live in me? After all, this week I have not loved my wife as Christ loved the Church. I was silent when the clerk gave me more change than I was owed. I put a lot more energy into checking the Brewers scores than I did into studying his Word." But when these sins torture us remember that God has forgiven us. All our sins have been wiped clean. Read what his Word says. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." John says in our text for today, "When our hearts condemn us God is greater than our hearts." Repent over the sins you commit. Go to God every day asking for his forgiveness. And know that he is great enough to forgive them all and continue to strive to live with not just words but in actions also. Every minute we are clothed by the holiness of our baptism. We are holy in God's sight. And with that holiness that God has given to us love your wife as Christ loved the Church, be honest in all your dealings, and spend time in God's Word. That is who we are now that God lives in us.

God also tells us to do one other thing as part of our new lives where he lives in us. He tells us to ask him for anything. John tells us: "we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him." We now have God living in us and we are now set free to do what pleases him. And it pleases him when we go to him in prayer and ask him to care for our lives.

And what a privilege it is for us to go and ask God with confidence. It may seem like such a small thing but if you don't ask you won't receive.

Randy Pausch wrote a book entitled, "The Last Lecture." He decided to write this book after he was diagnosed with terminal cancer to pass down to his students and children some of the important things he learned while he was alive. In this book he spends a whole chapter on the benefits of asking.

[Excerpt from book not included due to copyright laws]

If Randy Pausch can be so confident to ask for things from people how can we not go to God with even more confidence now that he lives in us. If he has such a close relationship with us that he now lives in us how will he not care enough to give us everything we need.

Look to the Old Testament. See how Daniel considered it such a tremendous blessing to

Our relationship has changed. We are not God's enemies but his children. John even begins this section of Scripture by addressing us as children.