

Sermon followed by Service

April 21, 2024

1 John 4:1-6

Who are we to believe? Now that Tom Skilling has retired, whom should we believe for our weather reports? Now that we're in an election year, whom should we believe for our election news - Fox or CNN? Whom should we believe for our election truth - the prosecutors or the defense attorneys? Next week at the Lake County home show, which contractors should I believe? I could go on and on: Whom are we to believe?

It's not just a matter of rain or shine, whom we watch, whom we vote for. It's not just a matter of a solid deck or spongy, quality concrete or sloppy. It can be a matter of life or death - which doctor do I believe? Or it can be a matter of something far more serious than life or death, it can be a matter of godly or ungodly, with Christ or anti-Christ - it can be a matter of heaven or hell.

John wrote our lesson today for people who were facing the question: "Who are we to believe?" not about weather, not just about politics and politicians, not just about home repair or doctoring. John was writing to people in danger of being sucked in and led astray by false teachers.

Hearing that, what might we think? Some might think: "I'm a member of St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church; I'm a member of the WELS. I know what to believe and teach. I'm set and safe." Others might think: "What's the big deal? I have

friends who go to 7 different churches and we all believe in God. It really doesn't matter what church you go to. We're all basically the same." Still others might think: "What Jesus has for us, the life and the love that Jesus has for us, the promise and truth that Jesus has for us - it's too special and precious to take for granted; it's too special and precious to think: "It doesn't really matter."

John writes for all of us: "**Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.**" John writes: "**Dear friends.**" This isn't a matter of John protecting his turf; this is a shepherd protecting his sheep. "**Do not believe every spirit.**" John isn't warning us about supernatural spirits of the spirit world. John is warning us about false prophets, false teachers, people who are preaching, teaching, saying things that aren't true about God and God's Word. How do we know that John is talking about people? John says so - "**many false prophets have gone out into the world.**" John used much the same words back in chapter 2 talking about people who used to be part of the congregation, but left the truth and went out to speak anti-Christ, their words in place of Christ's Word, to speak anti-Christ, their words against Christ and his Word. Because there are so many false teachers putting their word in place of and against Christ, what does John say? He doesn't say: "No big deal." John joins Jesus in saying: "**Watch out.**" He joins Paul in saying: "**Watch out.**" He joins Moses and Jeremiah and Peter in saying: "**Watch out and test [them].**"

Test them for what? The test isn't: "Do I like what they say? Do they say what I want to hear?" I have ears that itch to hear things that aren't true or good for me. The test isn't: "Do they make me feel good? Do they feel right to me?" I have a whole set of feelings that are never and will never be in tune with God. The test isn't: "Do they look good, sound good, get us thinking, keep our interest?" Moses and Paul both thought themselves lousy speakers; as a preacher and teacher Jesus had more people leave him than stick with him. The test isn't: "What do we think of them? Do we like what they say? Are they successful?" No, Satan has had great success in getting people to like what he says, to fall for people spreading his lies.

So what is the test? "What do they say? Do their words match up with God's Word? Does their teaching match up with God's teaching?"

In our lesson, John gave his people the Jesus Christ test. In that place at that time, false teachers were denying Jesus as God and Christ as man and what the God-man Jesus Christ has done for us. So John warned them: **"This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God."** We still have false teachers saying much the same things about Jesus today. But that's not all we need to watch and test for. Paul warned about teachers teaching what people want to hear instead of what Jesus has to say. Jesus warned about teachers looking good, sounding good, but putting the words and works of self in place of the words and works of God. Jeremiah warned about prophets

denying the need to repent - “We’re God’s people; we’re fine just the way we are.”

Sometimes the teaching we’re testing may be clear and plain as right or wrong. Sometimes Satan dresses his teachers up with Jesus-smiles and Jesus-talk as he subtly plays the long game, the long scam - with a Jesus-smile saying the Bible is really important but it needs an update, with Jesus-words saying that sin doesn’t matter like it used to, with a Jesus-smile and Jesus-words saying his sacraments don’t really matter. Just because someone has a Jesus-smile and uses Jesus-words doesn’t mean they’re sharing Jesus. We need to test more than just the outward look; we need to test deeper than just the surface words. We don’t test by what feels good to us; we test by what they say - do their words match God’s Word.

Why is this such a big deal? Well, what does Jesus say? **“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”** But what about the false shepherd? **“He comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”** God’s Word connects us with God; twisting God’s Word twists and disconnects from God. Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise for salvation; listening to what our itching ears want to hear turns us into fools pretending we know better than God.

You know people like that, people who think or thought their smarts better than God’s smarts, people who think or thought their feelings to be more right and reliable than God’s Word. You know people like that. Adam and Eve. You and me.

We know how easy it can be to get suckered into a lie, how easy it can be to run with our feelings. That's why John and Paul and Peter and Jesus all warn us - "Watch out. Test the spirits. Steer clear of those who don't teach the truth."

But Jesus doesn't just give us a warning about locking the doors after we already let the thief in. Jesus does more. Jesus gives us himself to be our Shepherd and Savior. Not just to teach and to talk, but to give his life for us. Our Shepherd became the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. Our Shepherd sacrificed his life so that we can be forgiven. But he didn't just give up his life. This is what makes his words so powerful. Jesus took back his life. Jesus isn't just our dead Good Shepherd; Jesus is our Living Good Shepherd. As our Living Shepherd, Jesus has something better for us than the lies of this world. He has something better for us than whatever we might want or feel. He has life for us. Life without the poison of lies; life without the pain of disappointment. Life blessed and based on something more real than whatever we might feel today. Your Good shepherd has life for you - Life with God, safe and secure with no more death or mourning or crying or pain. Life filled with goodness and mercy, dwelling in the house of the Lord. That what Jesus has for you - in his Word.

That's why John can say: **"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."** In a world of spirits out to lead us astray, we have what it takes [the Bible] to test the spirits. In a world out to cut us off from God, you have

the One who is greater than the world. And with him, not only will you win, but you have already won!

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. ...

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Amen.

April 20 & 21, 2024

DIVINE SERVICE II

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... the Truth of Jesus is under attack (as it has been since the Garden of Eden). While some people around us see that as good, a world without Truth is a world wandering and adrift (at best), or determinedly running toward the edge that lands in hell.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we have the Good Shepherd calling us, leading us, guiding us into his Truth for a never-ending life of goodness and mercy in the house of the Lord forever!

OPENING HYMN

“The King of Love My Shepherd Is”
Hymn 552

The King of love my shepherd is, whose goodness fails me never;
I nothing lack if I am his, and he is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow, my Savior gently leads me,
and where the verdant pastures grow, with food celestial feeds me.

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, but yet in love he sought me
and on his shoulder gently laid and home, rejoicing, brought me.

In death’s dark vale I fear no ill with you, dear Lord, beside me,
your rod and staff my comfort still, your cross before to guide me.

You spread a table in my sight, a banquet here bestowing;
your oil of welcome, my delight; my cup is overflowing!

And so through all the length of days your goodness fails me never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing your praise within your house forever!

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

CONFESSION

M: Dear friends, let us approach God with a true heart and confess our sins, asking him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

C: **Lord of life, I confess that I am by nature dead in sin.**

For faithless worrying and selfish pride,

For sins of habit and sins of choice,

For the evil I have done and the good I have failed to do,

I deserve to be cast away from your presence forever.

O Lord, I am sorry for my sins. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake.

ABSOLUTION

M: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. In his great mercy, God made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our sins. Hear the word of Christ through his called servant: I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY (*Kyrie*)

M: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

For the well-being of all people everywhere, that they may receive from you all they need to sustain body and life, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the spread of your life-giving gospel throughout the world, that all who are lost in sin may be brought to faith in you, hear our prayer, O Christ.

C: **Christ, have mercy.**

M: For patience and perseverance in this life, that we may not lose the hope of heaven as we await your return, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: Lord of life, live in us that we may live for you.

C: **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for the sheep. Lead us now to the still waters of your life-giving Word that we may abide in your Father's house forevermore; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Acts 20:28–32

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 23F

1 My shep - herd will sup - ply my need, Je -
 2 When I walk through the shades of death, his
 3 The sure pro - vi - sions of my God at -

ho - vah is his name; in pas - tures fresh he
 pres - ence is my stay; one word of his sup -
 tend me all my days; oh, may his house be

makes me feed be - side the liv - ing stream.
 port - ing breath drives all my fears a - way.
 my a - bode and all my work be praise.

He brings my wan - d'ring spir - it back when
 His hand, in sight of all my foes, will
 There would I find a set - tled rest while

I for - sake his ways and leads me, for his
 still my ta - ble spread; my cup with bless - ings
 oth - ers go and come, no more a stran - ger

mer - cy's sake, in paths of truth and grace.
 o - ver - flows; his oil a - noints my head.
 or a guest but like a child at home.

SECOND READING

1 John 4:1-6

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God:

Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 10:14

Alleluia. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Alleluia.

GOSPEL

John 10:11–18

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

“Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart”

Hymn 817

Lord, thee I love with all my heart; I pray thee, ne'er from me depart,
with tender mercy cheer me. Earth has no pleasure I would share;
yea, heav'n itself were void and bare if thou, Lord, wert not near me.
And should my heart for sorrow break, my trust in thee can nothing shake.
Thou art the portion I have sought; thy precious blood my soul has bought.
Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, my God and Lord,
forsake me not! I trust thy Word.

Yea, Lord, 'twas thy rich bounty gave my body, soul, and all I have
in this poor life of labor. Lord, grant that I in ev'ry place
may glorify thy lavish grace and help and serve my neighbor.
Let no false doctrine me beguile; let Satan not my soul defile.
Give strength and patience unto me to bear my cross and follow thee.
Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, my God and Lord,
in death thy comfort still afford.

Lord, let at last thine angels come, to Abr'ham's bosom bear me home
that I may die unfearing; and in its narrow chamber keep
my body safe in peaceful sleep until thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me that these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, thy glorious face, my Savior and my fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,
and I will praise thee without end.

SERMON

1 John 4:1-6

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.

Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

OFFERING

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PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Loving Shepherd of the sheep, fill us with contentment and confidence during this season as we celebrate your Easter victory. You laid down your life for the sheep and then rose again to assure us that you give us eternal life.

Good Shepherd, save us.

Strengthen our faith to follow where you lead, to the green pastures of your Word, the quiet waters of our baptism, and the gracious table of your body and blood where our cup overflows with your forgiving love. Guide us to find in you the gate that leads to safety and good pastures.

Good Shepherd, lead us.

Guard and protect us from those who want to lead us astray and snatch us out of your hand. Give us courage to fight against the devil and wisdom to recognize false teachers. Lead us to honor and follow those you have called to shepherd your flock, the Church.

Good Shepherd, guide us.

Let your rod and your staff comfort us and all your sheep in times of sickness and sadness and especially when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. [We include in our prayers today... *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] May we find in your redemption and your Father's resolve the unbreakable promise that we will dwell in your house forever.

Good Shepherd, console us.

Move us to reach out to sheep who are not yet a part of our sheep pen but whom you have claimed as your own. Give us your passion to search for the sheep who are lost and lead us to rejoice when they have been found.

Good Shepherd, inspire us.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

We thank you for all the blessings we have gained from your goodness: family and friends, wealth and health, work and leisure. Give us wisdom to long for and cherish your more precious gifts, your Word and sacraments, so that your goodness and love may follow us all the days of our life.

Good Shepherd, hear us. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. **Amen.**

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)

M: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

M: Lift up your hearts.

C: **We lift them up unto the Lord.**

M: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

C: **It is good and right so to do.**

M: It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who rose from the dead in glorious triumph to bring forgiveness to the world and everlasting life to all who believe.

Therefore with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *Sanctus*

O holy, holy, holy
Lord God of pow'r and might,
Your glory, earth and heaven
In countless ways recite.

Hosanna! Come and save us,
Lord God of hosts on high,
And in your grace and mercy
Receive our fervent cry.

Hosanna in the highest!
How truly blest is he
Who in God's name is coming
To set his people free!
He comes to bring salvation
And with his blood outpoured,
Deliver us from bondage—
Hosanna, mighty Lord!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

M: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my † body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my † blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

M: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

LAMB OF GOD *Agnus Dei*

Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; have mer - cy on us.
Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God,
you take a - way the sin of the world;
grant us your peace. A - men.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

“I Know That My Redeemer Lives”

Hymn 441

I know that my Redeemer lives! What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead; he lives, my everliving head!

He lives triumphant from the grave; he lives eternally to save;
he lives all-glorious in the sky; he lives exalted there on high.

He lives to bless me with his love; he lives to plead for me above;
he lives my hungry soul to feed; he lives to help in time of need.

He lives to grant me rich supply; he lives to guide me with his eye;
he lives to comfort me when faint; he lives to hear my soul’s complaint.

He lives to silence all my fears; he lives to wipe away my tears;
he lives to calm my troubled heart; he lives all blessings to impart.

He lives, my kind, wise, heav’nly friend; he lives and loves me to the end;
he lives, and while he lives, I’ll sing; he lives, my Prophet, Priest, and King.

He lives and grants me daily breath; he lives, and I shall conquer death;
he lives my mansion to prepare; he lives to bring me safely there.

He lives, all glory to his name! He lives, my Jesus, still the same.
Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives: I know that my Redeemer lives!

CLOSING PRAYER

M: We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet that you have given us to eat and to drink in this sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith, nourished our hope, and strengthened our love. By your Spirit help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

BLESSING

M: The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"I Am Jesus' Little Lamb"

Hymn 804

I am Jesus' little lamb; ever glad at heart I am,
for my Shepherd gently guides me, knows my need and well provides me,
loves me ev'ry day the same, even calls me by my name.

Day by day, at home, away, Jesus is my staff and stay.
When I hunger, Jesus feeds me, into pleasant pastures leads me;
when I thirst, he bids me go where the quiet waters flow.

Who so happy as I am, even now the Shepherd's lamb?
And when my short life is ended, by his angel host attended,
he shall fold me to his breast, there within his arms to rest.

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