

5th Sunday of Easter – B
LSB #527
Text – 1 John 4:3

...every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming & now is in the world already.

THE SPIRIT OF THE ANTICHRIST

Some years ago, a man was telling his friend, “My uncle in Detroit tried to make a new kind of car. He took the engine from a Ford, the transmission from an Oldsmobile, the tires from a Cadillac, & the exhaust system from a Plymouth.”

“Really?” said the friend. “What did he end up with?” The man answered, “Fifteen years for theft.” *PAUSE*

It doesn't work to mix & match parts from different cars, & it doesn't work to mix & matches teachings from different religions. In a very real sense, trying to add to, or take away from, God's teaching in Holy Scripture is no different than theft. To do so is not unlike stealing the life giving breath from a living human being.

As Jesus famously replied to one of the devil's temptations, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” The Word of our Lord created life, & His Word is sustaining life yet today. If we choose to mix & match parts, if we aren't humble enough to take His Word at face value, we deserve much more than 15 years for theft.

Already in the early days of the Christian church, while the Apostle John was still alive, some in the Christian church were not satisfied with the teaching of the disciples about Jesus. The concept that Jesus was truly God, & truly man, was a difficult one to grasp. Numerous attempts were made to give an in-depth explanation of the paradox.

One group taught that Jesus only appeared to be human. He only appeared to have died. Others tried to explain things by saying Jesus used magic tricks in an effort to appear like God. They were reasoning that if Jesus truly were God He could never have been crucified. Religions with ancient roots, such as Judaism & Islam, & religions with recent roots, such as Mormons & Jehovah Witnesses, struggle with believing what the Word of God clearly says about Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, born of the virgin Mary, crucified, died & buried.

Because of the false teaching that so quickly developed regarding God's Son, creeds became popular as an easy to use measuring stick for evaluating the truthfulness of a teacher's claims. Judaism, Islam, Mormonism & the Jehovah's Witnesses, not surprisingly, all reject the use of the three historic creeds of Christianity.

For thousands of years, billions of Christians have held those creeds to be true statements of nature of the Triune God. In the Apostle John's day, the threat of false teaching was very real, so he warned his churches, "...every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God." John even categorized such teaching as the spirit of the antichrist.

For much of our nation's history, false teachings about Jesus were easily recognized & held at bay. That's no longer the case as every man, woman & child feels free to create their own Jesus in whatever image they'd like. We each get to have our own version of the truth, & along with that, teaching concerning the antichrist is just as convoluted.

Much of it revolves around political leaders; I think every president since Teddy Roosevelt has been called the antichrist at one time or another. A group of students in

my class at seminary labeling another of the students as the antichrist. They even put it in print in the student newspaper, & they were not playing a practical joke.

The Pope has been labeled the antichrist, along with Communism, any Protestant denomination, Jon Hus, Martin Luther, & I think lately, in the minds of Green Bay Packer fans, Brett Favre. The popular fiction series, *Left Behind*, has done even more to confuse the scene

concerning the antichrist. The truth is, very little is said in the Bible about the antichrist. In some cases it speaks of the antichrist in the singular, such as the *Left Behind* series portrays, one big bad evil man. In other cases the Word of God speaks of the antichrist in a plural sense, as today's sermon text could be taken:

“...every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming & now is in the world already.” Simply looking at that text from Holy Scripture reveals that the spirit of the antichrist has already animated billions of people worldwide. Everyone who is not a Christian has the spirit of antichrist moving them.

As we're honest & humble, we too admit that our thoughts, words & deeds are often anti to Christ's teaching. The primary purpose of the Law is to bring us to that conclusion. One common problem we have in using the Word of God is that we mix & match different pieces of the Law & Gospel to suit our own tastes, to suit our own pet sins.

The Law is meant to cut to the chase & kill. The words about what God has done for our salvation are also meant to cut to the chase, but for the purpose of bringing life.

Pride & arrogance need to hear the razor sharp Law. A broken & contrite heart needs the healing & courage which the message of God's forgiveness creates & sustains.

Deuteronomy 8:3 makes a nice illustration of Law & Gospel usage. "And [Yahweh] humbled you & let you hunger & fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

As Yahweh humbles, or allows hunger, His Law is demonstrated. As the manna feeds & sustains life, the Gospel is being illustrated. If we're tempted to mix & match Scripture to suit our tastes, we are stealing the humbling effect & the life giving effect of God's Word. As we do so we are acting with the spirit of the antichrist. From the Bible it seems clear that one day there will be a singular antichrist who will in power, sign & wonder do all he can to deceive the people of the world. Until that day comes, we should be on alert for the prowling lion who seeks to devour us with his deceptions, lies & false teachings.

There are many voices today, clamoring for our attention, claiming to have the truth, promising any manner of blessing. Most of those messages promise a quick fix type of spirituality – just follow this easy formula & you will find fulfillment. If they do not point to Jesus Christ, in the flesh, as the fulfillment of God's demands, they are the spirit of the antichrist.

Now, what does this knowledge of Christ in the flesh bring about in our lives? True love! That's not at all like the romantic love that is held up so highly by the bridal shows that gearing up for summer just now. Christ's love, as He demonstrated on the cross, is a difficult, severe & costly type of love.

It's the thing that causes us to work against our very nature, putting ourselves last & others first. True love hurts because it costs so much of us. The spirit of the antichrist is always motivating us to think of me, myself & I. If I'm uncomfortable with a particular word of God, antichrist encourages me to apply my own definition.

For that reason the 1st reading from Acts highlights the exchange between Philipp & the eunuch, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" My sinful nature will always mix & match the Words of God to suit my tastes. Instruction to understand the Bible may be a luxury, but it certainly is not frivolous.

One day there will be a fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the antichrist. When it happens, more than a 2nd grade knowledge of Scripture will be a tremendous blessing. Training & discipline in the Word of God will be a source of life as the Gospel reading said, "...every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." As our old sinful nature battles within us, as the corruption of our nation continues, each of us will be tested in this life. As John wrote, the spirit of antichrist, "...now is in the world already."

Yet St. John also reassures us, "Little children, you are from God & have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Whoever knows God listen to the Word of God. Whoever is not from God does not listen. "By this we know the Spirit of truth & the spirit of error."

We've not been left as orphans without an inheritance in this world, but too often we don't make use of it. We mix & match pieces of our inheritance to suit our liking, to suit our pet sins. Whether it is singular or plural, one or many, antichrists, our defense is

the Word of God. Apart from Jesus we can do nothing no matter how important, no matter how special, we feel.

The dangerous thing that is peculiar to the spirit of the antichrist is that it operates from within the visible church, & it is a phenomenon of the end of the age. We are living in that age. Peter wrote of the lion prowling around looking for someone to devour, as a warning, but as the spirit of antichrist works to deceive, Satan finds it more effective to appear as an angel of light.

So John wrote, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” As the Law makes clear, we, of our own accord, are helpless in this fight.

It is Jesus Christ alone, who as God took on human flesh that He might redeem all of our existence, from the womb to the tomb that every aspect of our lives might be made holy & precious in His sight, & just as importantly in our sight. O that God would strengthen our ability to see & to believe. Amen.

O bringer of salvation, who wondrously hast wrought Thyself the revelation of love beyond our thought, we worship Thee, we bless Thee, to Thee O Christ, we sing; we praise Thee & confess Thee, our gracious Lord & King. Amen.