

How Do We Know?

✦ **We belong to the truth.** (vv.18-20)

✦ **God lives in us.** (vv.21-24)

In the name of Jesus, the Lover of our souls, the Confidence of our prayers, dearly redeemed:

One of our Seminary professors told us something strange in class. Dr. Becker said that when he was a boy, he feared he had no faith. He believed Jesus died and rose again – and all for him. That's the essence of saving faith, believing Jesus did all this *for you*. Still, young Siegbert feared his faith was not what it should be. Dr. Martin Luther said that to not know you have faith would be like unknown treasure buried in your back yard. What good is it? Today the dear Holy Spirit digs up that treasure for us.

While preparing this sermon four people came to mind: two women who lost their marriages, two pastors who lost their ministries. One preached here in the past and has been in the papers. The other three individuals you've never met. You can all relate if you ever had a bad dream about your spouse or a friend, then woke up wondering if you were at fault. **How Do We Know?** Mostly, **You Do We Know** our standing with God? First, the dear Holy Spirit shows us how we can know for certain that...

✦ **We belong to the truth.** (vv.18-20)

“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, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”

One pastor came to mind because he was a classmate who preached this text at Sem. I don't know whether the sin that cost his ministry was embezzlement or fornication. And whether the second pastor used synod funds for personal expenses or needy families, neither was approved. The newspaper reported he pled guilty to embezzlement, misusing a money trust. My earthly father often said, “There but for the grace of God go I.” How can God's grace use this text to save us from the grief of sin? Think of David in the Old Testament and Peter in the New. And what about when accusations are false?

First, through His holy Apostle John, our Lord calls us, *“Dear children....”* This is profound. It means my heavenly Father is always watching whether anyone else is or not. He knows what sin lurks inside this heart of mine to be unfaithful to Him. The voice of conscience is a good thing. Dear God, do not let up when I'm in danger of dishonoring you, my family, or your family at church! False accusations or true, by God's grace and mercy in your Baptism, you are still *“Dear children”* of God.

Before the darkness of sin sets in, someone leaves the light. For David, it was *“in the spring when kings go off to war....”* (2 Samuel 11:1ff) He took life easy and stayed in Jerusalem. As the dark of night set in, he fell to adultery and murder. In the light Jesus' warnings, Peter refused to listen. Then in the flickering firelight he denied his Lord. Beware, my sinful heart, of those things you want to hide. *“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.”* (1:6) Both women brought their problems into the light by seeking help from fellow Christians. David and Peter first needed the surgery of Nathan's rebuke and Jesus' look. How vastly different the outcome when admit we have a problem. Here in the light, **We belong to the truth.**

How do you answer when your heart condemns you, troubling your conscience? How can you safely come into God's presence? First, come clean. Confess as we do in the Lord's Prayer and in worship the guilt of all sin. Don't try to piecemeal it. Break one command of God, you've broken all. Right before our text the Holy Spirit says through John: *“Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer,*

and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” (3:15 NIV84) There is no way and no need to justify ourselves. *“We set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us”* because *“God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”* He knows that He put His Name on us in our Baptism. He’s always watching over us to keep us from sin, living in the light of God’s truth. God knows He sent His Son to bleed and die for all our sins – known and unknown to us. God *“knows everything.”* He overrules our hearts when they accuse us of sin. So come clean and come often. God gives us His grace through Word and sacrament for strength to let love show. **How Do We Know?** Answer: **We belong to the truth.** Faith bears good fruit from words and creeds into good deeds. Kids come with their parents and grandparents to work days at church. Others are caring for family and neighbors at home. Love lives. Love gives. And we can know because...

✠ **God lives in us. (vv.21-24)**

“Dear friends,” or better translation, *“Dearly beloved....”* The unconditional *agape*-love of God in Christ sacrificed His Son and sent His Spirit to live in us. Jesus promised in our Gospel lesson (John 15:1-8) again today: *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”*

It was clear in the lives of both women that God lived in them. Both wanted to keep their marriages together. One tried and tried until she finally asked advice from a pastor friend. He suggested she make two columns on a paper of all God’s expectations in marriage. List the ones she had in the plus side, those missing on the minus side. The plus side was empty. So she went to her own pastor and asked what to do. He told her if she had come three years earlier, she had Scriptural grounds for divorce: marital unfaithfulness or desertion. Her husband destroyed their marriage and left her no choice.

The other woman was told by God fearing friends and family that her husband deserted her. She knew he was several states away and determined not divorce him. I remember her from many years of prayer because she was such an excellent evangelist. She taught some teenagers in the congregation how to talk to strangers about their faith. Somehow her estranged husband met a WELS pastor. Stories came back of him helping build a mission church. Last I heard they were back together. She gave him room to repent, and by God’s grace He did. Both women gave evidence by good works that **God lives in us.**

God has an awesome way of using His Word and sacrament to take our fear away. He helps us see that treasure of faith, first in His Word and then in our hearts as **God lives in us.** John says in the next chapter: *“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us.”* (1 John 4:18–19 NIV84) When the law and your conscience has done its strange work, then Good News of Jesus death in your place and new life in Baptism takes your fear away. *“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we [guard and treasure] his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son , Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he has commanded us.”*

How Do We Know our standing with God? **We belong to the truth and God lives in us.** If we’ve fallen into sin, God wants us back in repentant faith. Jesus says, *“Love as I have loved you.”* Accept God’s love, then give it back to others. Don’t expect them to forgive and forget, but trust that God always does. He washed our sins away with His holy, precious blood. They’re gone. *“Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.”* (Hebrews 8:12) *“Guard and treasure”* God’s commands by making restitution if you can. Humbly suffer whatever consequences He sends. Accept the challenges to give others God’s unconditional love too. We do know. Look at Jesus. Be at peace. Amen.