



## Easter 5

April 29, 2018 – 9:00 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: Jesus is *The* “Good Shepherd” of His Flock!

### Sermon Text: 1 John 4:1-11

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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, <sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

The Great Lakes, the Great Plains, the Great Salt Flats of Utah, the Great Wall of China. What a superlative the word “Great” is! Just ask *Tony the Tiger* his opinion on *Frosted Flakes*. The word “Great” is also applied to people and nations: Alexander the Great, Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, the Greatest Generation, Great Britain, and how can we

forget President Trump's campaign slogan, *"Make America Great again!"* "Great" is a word that elevates its object in the mind of the hearer and sets the "Lakes" or the "Plains" or the "Wall" of China or Alexander, Peter, Catherine, Britain or America on a pedestal above all others . . . **greater than** all others. In our text, the Apostle John identifies the One who is truly and eternally and universally **greater than** all others, and he assures us that the **"One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."** Truly,

### **GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD IN CHRIST IS GREATER THAN ALL THAT OPPOSE HIM!**

That's an assurance that we so much need in this world of competing belief systems, values and ideologies—the **"viewpoint of the world"** John calls it in our text, each tempting us and our children, wanting to claim us as their own. Such "viewpoints" competing for our hearts and minds appear very great on the surface—even to believers, at times. John describes them in our text when he warns his readers, **"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."**

Don't make the mistake of depersonalizing the word **"spirit"** here, as if it simply refers to some disembodied belief system, value or ideology. There's really no such thing. In fact, **"every spirit"** that **"is not from God"** has the same distinguishing characteristics. First, it's embodied in and controls the minds and hearts—indeed, the lives—of all who aren't connected by Spirit-wrought faith to **"the Vine,"** Jesus Christ. Second, it entices those who like the **"Ethiopian eunuch"** have been baptized into Christ—**"branches"** that have been grafted into **"the Vine"**—but live in cultures that aren't connected to Him and constantly press them to sever their ties with **"the Vine."**

For the initial recipients of this letter from the aged apostle John, **"the spirit of falsehood"** was that of the Greco-Roman culture that enveloped their lives in the cosmopolitan city of Ephesus. Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Ionia in Asia Minor—modern-day Turkey. In John's day, Ephesus commanded the west end of the great trade route to Asia, and had easy access to the other two main trade routes to Egypt and to Europe. It's seaport was still being maintained by the Roman Army Corp. of Engineers, as it were, who fought what proved to be a losing battle against silt and mud that ultimately choked the harbor. Its greatest claim to fame in John's day, however, was its imposing temple to Artemis, the Roman goddess of fertility, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. Tourists came from far and wide to worship at her magnificent shrine and consort with the "sacred prostitutes" who plied their trade there. In John's day, Ephesus was—in every sense—a first rate city, complete with theaters, stadiums and art galleries.

Ephesus was a seaport city, the major regional trade center and replete with competing religions and philosophies—not unlike the Seattle metro area. Just as the faith of John's **"dear children"** was being tried to the core, so, too, is our faith in Jesus.

The **"spirit of falsehood"** and the **"spirit of anti-Christ"** thrive in this region as much, or more, than they do in any other part of our nation, offering a veritable smorgasbord of options like New Age spirituality, cults, nature worship, anti-theism, self-help gurus and—perhaps most harmful of all—**"false prophets"** who parade around in clergy vestments. Christ warned, **"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they're ferocious wolves"** (Matt. 7:15), and John says, **"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit."**

So, we need to ask ourselves an important question: ***"To what extent have we been open to a religious teaching, philosophical perspective or spiritual concept that is contrary to the doctrines of God's inspired Scriptures?"*** At times, the distinction between what God says in His Word and a competing idea is extremely subtle. At other times, the

distinction is crystal clear. It is the less overt ones that Satan uses most effectively to undermine our faith and our adherence to the truth:

- the **“spirit of compromise”** rather than that of a sound confession in the face of those who see Jesus as one of the many “faces” of God or deem Him “less than” God
- the **“spirit of relativism,”** that asks along with Pontius Pilate, **“What is truth?” (John 18:38)** when the One who is **“the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6)** was standing right in front of him
- the **“spirit of immorality”**—or, worse yet, **amoral**ity that says, “there are no moral absolutes; no right or wrong”
- the **“spirit of accommodation,”** which is intolerable of your right to call something or someone wrong
- the **“spirit of intimidation,”** which counts it more important to be politically correct than biblically accurate

John directs us to **“test the spirits to see whether they are from God.”** And what **“spirits”** pass that test? He tells us: **“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.”** He adds that **“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.”** John says that the **“spirits”** are discernable. If they don’t acknowledge that the eternally divine Son of God took on a fully human nature in order to achieve the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation for all mankind, then they **“are not from God”**; they’re not the **“Spirit of truth”** but **“the spirit of falsehood”** and, as such, we should reject them!

Why? Because John says, **“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them. The One who is in us 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”!**

We are **“from God”** because His **“Spirit of truth”** brought us to faith in His Son, Jesus! In Jesus—and by the power of His indwelling **“Spirit of truth”**—we stand together united in our efforts to dispel the darkness of the **“spirit of falsehood”** and the **“spirit of the antichrist.”** In Christ alone our hope is found! For **“the One who is in us . . . is greater than the one who is in the world.”** We listen to Him alone in the pages and promises of His Word, for His **“Word is truth” (John 17:17)**! It’s all about Jesus!

Jesus is **“greater than”** the false spirits of every day and age; **“greater than”** the spirit who minimizes or denies human sinfulness; **“greater than”** the **“spirit of antichrist”** who is at work **“in the world”**; **“greater than”** our sin of giving way to those spirits in our thoughts, words and actions. In the previous chapter of this letter, John wrote: **“This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (1 John 3:19-20).** Yes, Jesus is **“greater than”** all that would seek to **“overcome”** us or rob us of our trust in Him. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans: **“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (8:36-37).** By His life, death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus is **“greater than”** all our spiritual foes!

Just after our text, John writes, **“If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.”** We **“acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God”** through our Baptism into Him, just like the Ethiopian eunuch joyfully did in His Baptism at the hands of Philip; through the Holy Supper, in which we eat and drink Christ’s true body and blood for the assurance of our forgiveness and the strengthening of our faith in Him. And, in Christ, by the power of His Holy Spirit, we **“acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God”** by our lives of Christ-like love for one another and for all the people of this world. On that high note, John concludes the words of our text for this Fifth Sunday of the Easter season:

**Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**

May we never, ever forget that the Savior we serve is **“greater than”** all! Amen.