

1 John 5:5-12.

5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. 6 This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 9 We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. 10 Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

**The Spirit, the water, and the blood testify
that we have eternal life in Christ Jesus.**

This weekend marks the unofficial beginning of summer. Memorial Day weekend is a time when people really start thinking about summer vacations - getting out the boat, getting up to the lake. The school year has finished for some and others can't wait for the final few days to be over so that they can take a break and enjoy summer vacation. After a long winter and a strange spring, more than a few people are really looking forward to getting away and taking a break from the normal routine and getting into their summer routine.

We are getting into that summer routine here at church as well. We have already had our last Tuesday night Bible class of the season. This Sunday marks the last Sunday for Sunday school, the last Sunday for Sunday Morning Bible Class. But this does not mean that we are to take a summer break from church like we are children taking a break from elementary school. We are to remain in the word wherever we go, and we are to set aside time to spend in God's house as well. Whether it is on Sunday mornings or on Tuesday nights it is good to stay connected and be in God's house, with God's people, gathered around word and sacrament. For the word and sacraments bolster our faith. They revive and refresh us. They keep us connected to the source of life that is Christ Jesus.

It is good for a person to go to a quiet place and find some rest. Jesus himself said as much. It is good to break routine and get away. It is good for the body and for the mind, but the soul needs to be taken care of as well. The soul needs to be fed regularly by God's Word. We need to go to that quiet place and take Jesus with us. We need to

stay connected to his Word. We need to be nourished and fed. We need such year round spiritual care because wherever we go we can never get completely away from sin and its influence.

Even if you are on a boat, in the middle of a lake, in the middle of nowhere, sin is near. We of course are sinful; our thoughts are inclined toward evil. And whether we are truly aware of it or not, daily we breathe in the sinful influence of the world around us. A casual attitude toward sin floods our eardrums as we simply listen to the radio - or even to our friends or neighbors. A general indifference toward sins of sex and violence wash over us as we take in the latest summer movie. We turn on our television to see a comedian belittle our faith and a politician fail to defend our Christian morals. We read the newspaper and see how people are suffering, crime is rampant, nature itself is in turmoil and things aren't getting any better. Yes, it is good to get away and find some quiet time especially in such a stress-filled world, but how could we consider taking time off from God's Word and time off from being in God's house when so much is testing and pressing on our faith. Sin and its evil influence do not take a break during the summer months, so why should we take a break from God's Word.

The apostle John is often characterized as writing his epistles with a father's heart. Most likely an older man by the time he writes the short letters that we find at the end of our Bible, John often refers to the recipients of his letters as children. He seems to be a typical father concerned about his spiritual children. He knows what's out there, what his children will be facing, and he wants to prepare them. In this section he encourages his children to listen to the testimony of the Spirit of God. This spiritual father has a desire to build up his children in their faith because he knows that the world is trying to tear down and destroy the faith he has passed down to them.

John makes his plea to stay connected to God by using courtroom imagery and terminology. The believer's faith is constantly on trial. Like a slick-talking lawyer from some summer movie, the world builds its case against faith with subtle misdirection and sly manipulation of the truth. The world takes Jesus, and while recognizing his presence, makes him out to be no more than a minor character. How could he be the Savior? He was just a man, just a prophet. The world manipulates the truth and attacks our faith. The prosecution continues as the world points to the problems and the pains and the sufferings in this life (they might even try to take something like the tornado that hit Oklahoma and Texas) and somehow, somehow, anyway, tries to create a reasonable doubt in our minds about the love of God or they might try to shift the blame entirely unto Him. The world then attempts some classic misdirection as it points to the successful, those of whom have seemingly gotten to their place of comfort without any help from the Lord, and then leans in and devilishly reminds you that your God promises you the blessings of peace and joy and happiness and all too often those seem to be lacking in your life. The sinful world constantly sites the happenings and

the events of society today as evidence against a life of faith in order that you would be convinced that faith in God is useless and should just be abandoned for better things.

Sometimes their case can be very convincing. We look at the evidence that is presented: the struggle of the church, the plight of the Christian and it seems to be in obvious contrast with the pleasure of sin and the allure of temptation. Doubt creeps in, our faith is flattened by uncertainty and indifference, and we are suddenly overtaken by this crafty world and its sinister accomplice, Satan. Because so much of the way God deals with his people is subtle and indirect, because so much of our life with God is hidden, we are vulnerable to such doubt and Satan knows this. He takes great delight in exploiting our vulnerability, creating that reasonable doubt in our minds, and slowly and steadily destroying our faith.

However, this testimony from Satan and a sinful world is not the only testimony that it is given. This is not the only case, the only evidence, we have to consider. The Lord speaks. Through his Word he gives us his testimony and his testimony is clear. It is powerful.

People of all cultures are used to hearing human testimony in court and assigning great weight to it. The Lord God himself established for the Israelite courts a procedure for finding out the truth. The procedure was to find two or three objective witnesses besides the plaintiff to testify (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15). Inspired by the Spirit of God, John now makes a mysterious and fascinating statement to this point. He says that there are two unshakable witnesses to Christ's divine nature and his meaning for our life: they are the water and the blood, and then he adds a third – the Holy Spirit. Let me read to you his exact words: ***6 This is the one who came by water and blood— Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.***

Jesus came to this world, not just to be in this world but to overcome this world, and our enemies of sin and death for us. He did not come just to be our teacher, but to be our Savior. He was anointed at his baptism for this very purpose. The voice of the Father, the presence of the Spirit, affirmed this purpose with power. Jesus came by water (his baptism) and he came to suffer and die for our sin. He came by blood. And the Holy Spirit testifies to these things because the Spirit of God is the one who gave the prophets the words that foretold such events. As we read through the gospels, as we read and hear those familiar accounts of his suffering and death, how many times don't we hear how the ancient Scriptures being fulfilled! Jesus is the Son of God, who came to save us. He is the one who gives meaning and purpose to our lives. He came to give us real and lasting peace and joy. He came to give us eternal life.

The whole Bible, all of God's Word, testifies to this very fact. It all points to Jesus. The Spirit testifies! God himself testifies! There is no reason for us to doubt or discard our faith; for the testimony of God is far greater than the testimony of sinful men and women of this world. The testimony of God is true, it is superior in every way, and this testimony is given to us through the gospel. In both word and Sacrament the gospel

makes its powerful case and plants and nourishes and grows faith in our hearts. As John puts it, ***“For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.”*** The Word, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper: the Spirit, the water, and the blood, these three have been given by God to his church to strengthen and maintain our faith. That is why it is such a privilege and a joy to come together throughout the year - whether it is summer, spring, winter, or fall - to gather around these precious means of grace. The gospel testifies that God sent his son into this world to save sinners from sin and death and give us life eternal.

As we enter into God’s house we see the baptismal font and the water testifies. We often start our worship in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as we remember that he put his name on us at baptism. You are his own. You have the gifts of the Spirit of peace and joy. You have the victory that Jesus has won for you. You have access to the Father. We are able to praise his holy name and he hears our prayers because we are his children washed and cleansed and made holy by the water and the word. The water testifies!

As we gather for worship God teaches us all that we need to know about our salvation through his saving Word. We listen as it is read and explained and the Spirit does his work. The Spirit testifies! Through his testimony we learn how God planned and carried out our salvation. We hear of our sin. We are assured of God’s mercy and grace. We receive forgiveness. In countless different ways we are reminded of God’s undeserved love. We see Christ; we see our Savior Jesus. We are strengthened and our faith is fortified. We are built up to withstand the attacks of the world and our flesh.

And as we gather as a body united in faith we are also given one last witness. The forgiveness of God is not only announced, it is not only proclaimed in the hymns and readings and prayers, but it is placed into the hand of the communicant member, tasted by each individual who in faith comes to God’s altar and receives the very body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and the wine. Jesus gives to each one the forgiveness he won as he offers to us his very own body and blood. The blood testifies on our behalf!

The Spirit, and the water, and the blood, they testify that we are God’s children. They testify that we poor sinners have abundant forgiveness. They testify that we have life eternal in Jesus name. A gift that we not only wait to enjoy in full, but a gift we enjoy right now. We have been given lives filled with meaning and purpose and peace and joy right now. The Word, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper: these three testify and these three are in agreement. The Spirit works through these means of grace and assures us of God’s love and his power in our life.

We need this testimony. We need to be in God’s Word and connected to Christ who is our life. Wherever you are, wherever your summer plans take you, make time to be in God’s house gathered around word and sacrament. Find rest for your bodies, for your minds, but also for your souls. Be built up in your faith by this testimony of truth: In Christ Jesus you have life eternal. Amen.