



# Central Peninsula Church

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1 John 5:1-5

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## The Marks of Authentic Faith

I'm so grateful to be here this morning. In fact, this is something of a milestone for me. Because on Tuesday of this week, October 1, I celebrated my 7th year here at CPC. I'm so delighted to be a part of what God is doing here on this particular corner of the Peninsula. And you all have blessed me and my family in so many ways.

Have any of you seen the PBS show called "Antiques Roadshow?" I love that show. I can never seem to watch more than 10 minutes at a time but it fascinates me, especially when it's in England or Scotland someplace because they have really cool old stuff. And if you've seen it you know that the show is filmed in a kind of country fare atmosphere where people come and bring their old stuff to be examined by the experts. So people bring antique dolls, furniture, artwork; one guy brought in his collection of old brass oil cans. The last time I saw it, someone brought in a collection of miniature iron fireplaces. But the thing is, no one really knows what this stuff is worth, or whether or not it is authentic until it's examined by the experts. And so the experts look over the item, examining it according to certain criteria, looking for authenticating marks, such as signatures or factory markings or distinctive cuts in the glass to determine whether or not it is authentic, whether or not it is of any value. And you get kind of caught up in the thing trying to guess what the value of something is. But it's the expert who has the final say. He's the one who knows what to look for to determine the marks of authenticity.

And so this morning we're going to have a kind of roadshow of our own, only we're going to bring ourselves before the expert witness of the scriptures. To allow them to examine our hearts and our lives to determine the authenticity of our faith, to see if we bear the authenticating imprint of the Spirit of God in our lives.

So this morning we're going to ask ourselves this fundamental and critical question: How do I know that I am truly born of God? Is it a feeling? Is it a set of beliefs that I adhere to? Is it by membership in a church or Christian service? Is it something I inherited through my upbringing? How do I know that my life displays the authenticating marks of one who has been born again?

Remember what Jesus said, "I am the vine

you are the branches. . . and just as branch draws its life from the vine. . . you are to abide in me. . . and all who abide in me will bear much fruit." The fruit is the authenticating evidence that the branch is abiding in the life of the vine. And so we should be able to look at certain fruit in our lives to see whether or not we are truly, authentically, grafted into the life-giving resources of Jesus Christ. So that's what we're going to do this morning, we're going to check out the branches and see if they display the fruit of the life of Christ in us.

If you have a Bible with you this morning I'd like you to turn to 1 John 5 beginning at verse one. Let's read together:

**"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe (or obey) His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"** (vv.1-5).

The real intriguing part of the antique roadshow is when the experts draw their examination to a close and make their final assessment of the value of an object and they give you all of the reasons why. They tell you what they looked for and what authenticating marks are present or missing, and then he kind of pulls all the evidence together before his final conclusion. Well, we're picking this text up at a place like that. John has spent four chapters outlining the various marks of authentic faith. Now he's nearing the end of his wrap up and he gives us a sort of condensed version of three critical elements that should mark or define the life of authentic faith.

The first is clearly expressed in verse one: **"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."** Actually we could translate it this way: "Whoever believes, and keeps on believing that Jesus is the Christ, has been born of God." In other words, believing that Jesus is the Christ is evidence that you have been born of God. It proves that God has taken

the initiative in your life to give you new birth. That's the first authenticating mark: Believing that Jesus is the Christ.

Apparently John was speaking into a culture where people had concocted some pretty crazy ideas about who Jesus was, and what he had come to do. They considered themselves to be progressive thinkers. They taught that Jesus was really just a man, but the spirit of the Messiah came upon him at his baptism, performed miracles throughout his earthly career and then left him at the crucifixion. They denied the incarnation, that God had taken on flesh in the person of Jesus. They also denied the existence of sin and so to them the idea of a sinless Son of God who died on the cross for a sinful humanity was unnecessary. And they taught that Jesus was sort of a convenient friend who would affirm your right to live life the way you want.

And we live in similar times, don't we; where so many want to make Jesus out to be whatever they feel they need him to be - a wise man, a political rebel, a spiritual guru, a well-intentioned but misguided martyr. But John says for our faith to be authentic we must be absolutely clear about the fundamental identity of Jesus. And what we think about Jesus is central to where we stand with God. Many things can be legitimately debated in the scriptures but when it comes to the person of Jesus the Bible just doesn't give us a margin for error. Those who have been born of God believe that Jesus is the Christ. The promised Messiah of Israel. Which is shorthand in the development of the book for believing that Jesus is the savior, the One who rescues us from sin. So it is critical to think right about Jesus, but it is not merely mental assent to a noble idea, it is surrender of my whole life to my savior. That's the first and central mark of authentic faith.

## I. Believing that Jesus is the Christ

**A. Surrendering myself to the Savior.** Nancy and I were watching a documentary the other day on the Jesus movement which was a powerful move of the Spirit of God back in the late 60's up through the mid-70's that touched thousands of young counter culture hippie types like myself with the saving power of the Gospel. And this was a group of old musicians who had been saved and then used through their music during those exciting days. It was great. You know you're getting old when you enjoy listening to music and reminiscing about stuff that happened 27 years ago! Anyway, in one of the interviews Tommy Coomes, who was in the group Love Song, with great emotion in his voice said, "You know, we didn't have any theology, we really didn't know the Bible, we just knew two things: Jesus loved me this I know. . . and I

once was lost but now I'm found, was blind but now I see; and that turned our lives upside down."

Has God touched your life with this living truth? Do you know that Jesus is the Christ, the promised one of Old? Have you received his forgiveness and grace? This is the first mark of authentic faith: Surrender to the Savior.

But this surrender will have a transforming effect in your life. Look again at verse 1: "**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.**"

We had a great summer visiting with several families whom we love but seldom get a chance to see. And we had a delightful time reconnecting with these dear friends. The conversation would always shift at some point to, "How are your kids doing? How are Sarah and Colin? What's going on in their lives?". And there is a very natural affection that extends through generations. If I have loved the parents then I will naturally have affection and concern for the well being of their children. And that's John's point here. If I have been begotten of God and have fallen in love with my Father in heaven, then I will naturally love my brothers and sisters as well. So here is the second authenticating mark: Love for the children of God. Jesus said, "**By this shall all men know that you are my disciples; if you have love for one another.**"

I'm so grateful to be a part of a church where this reality is lived out every day. Where men and women are being deeply touched by the presence of Christ through people in this church. Many of you have stories of how God reached out to you through people in this body to heal, to bring restoration, to be Jesus for you in very tangible, life changing ways. Jerry Tankersly was a young pastor whose life basically fell apart when his marriage failed and he was forced to leave the ministry. He wrote about that time and said: "Filled with shame and a profound sense of failure, I separated from the church, believing that my life and ministry were over . . ." Then after years of defeat God graciously brought him to a body filled with the grace of God. He writes: "The congregation gave my life back to me. I experienced grace. Grace was mediated to me through the church. Up to that point, grace had been little more than an intellectual notion to be preached and taught. But now I experienced unconditional acceptance, forgiveness, and a new beginning in life." And I know many of you could tell similar stories this morning of how God has touched you through the church.

But some of you have received deep wounds from the church as well. And this is a particularly difficult word for you this morning. I think all of us somewhere along the line will be disappointed by

people in the church. It's just bound to happen. Someone treats us harshly, someone misunderstands us, someone (a leader perhaps) says something cruel or sarcastic that pushes all of our buttons. And we're tempted to run as fast as we can towards the exit sign never to return again. And you may have relationships with folks in this church, maybe with people in this room, where the wounds go deep and the resentments have been marinating in the juices of your pain or anger. It's tough, isn't it? But if we love the Father we will, over time and by the grace of God in our lives, love his kids, our brothers and sisters.

I have one sister. And we are so amazingly different. And I was born into that relationship without any consultation. No one asked me if I wanted her to be the sibling that I would spend my growing up years with. And I think if I was given the choice I probably would have chosen Debbie McDonald. And I'm sure she wouldn't have chosen me, especially after the time I put pepper in her jello!

But the point is: we don't get to choose who is begotten of God. That's the Father's business. We're called to learn how to be a family together, to dispense the grace and mercy and forgiving that is in Jesus to one another.

One thing that used to really bug me about this is that it seems so restrictive and ingrown, as if we're only to be concerned with our own kind. So why is John so concerned with us loving each another? Shouldn't we care about loving a lost and hurting world who are separated from Christ? Didn't Jesus call us by word and example to love the least of these, to be a light to the blind? But you know what occurred to me this time around as I sat with the text? This is the training ground. This is where we in a sense we experience our spiritual family of origin. It's in the tenderness and trust of our relationship in the body that we are strengthened to live boldly and confidently and courageously for Christ in the world.

So what does that love look like? How do we know we're really loving the children of God? Well, let's look at verse 2: **"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe (or obey) his commandments."**

That's kind of an odd answer, isn't it? It's not what you might expect. But the burden of the apostle John throughout this letter is to show how deeply connected these two loves really are. To love God means you will love the children of God, loving the children of God shows that you truly love God. I like how Eugene Peterson translates verse 20 of chapter four: "If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. . . you can't have one without the other." The two simply cannot be separated.

And John says it's when I'm loving God and obeying his commandments that I'm loving you the best I can. In other words, I love you best when my own life is following hard after God. I love you best when my life is being transformed by a love relationship with the Father and he in turn is loving you through me. But we cannot love one another in our own strength. Have you ever tried that? You get burnt out, don't you? Pretty soon you're more resentful than when you started. You end up adding more fire to your anger or more pain to your wounds. You can't do it! But when we purpose in our hearts to love God something happens in the core of who we are. We are transformed. You see, we can't honestly love God without being humbled by him. You just can't hang out with God for very long before he begins to confront you about your own lovelessness, your pettiness, your unforgiveness, your jealousy, the whole painful truth about your relational brokenness. And as he confronts us he tenderly begins to touch us, applying his grace to our wounds, dispensing his mercies over our brokenness, pouring the oil of forgiveness over our sins. And we are changed. And we begin to touch others with the grace, and the mercy, and the truth, and the forgiveness of God. How do we know we are loving well? We love God and he grabs a hold of our lives and he changes us to love like he does.

So authentic faith expresses itself as we surrender to the Savior and love the children of God.

But there's a third element that is woven into this. Look at verses 2 and 3:

**"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."**

John Stott calls obedience "the moral test." The apostle John has expressed this several times throughout this brief letter. In chapter 3 verse 10 he writes: **"By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God."** So my obedience is evidence that God is truly my Father and he is giving shape to my life. Which in the moral and ethical arena means that if my life has been truly gripped by God, I'll begin to make choices that reflect God's desires for me. I'll begin to do battle with certain temptations that never used to be an issue. I'll begin to question my motives in my business. I'll find myself struggling with larger ethical implication of my choices. I'll begin to feel less comfortable with the way certain habits have taken a hold in my life. My speech, my sexuality, my ambitions and goals are now being touched by the tender but truthful presence of God. But, God has gotten ahold of me and he won't

let go. And pretty soon he's captured your heart and all you want is more of Jesus giving shape to the core of who you are. And that's when we discover that the truth of verse 3 that his commandments really aren't such a burden after all, not because they're not hard, not because it's easy to break the bondage of sin. No, it's sometimes the hardest to face. But his commandments aren't burdensome because we know that they bring life, they set us free. We discover that obedience to God liberates us from the things that keep us defeated and discouraged, restless, fearful and frail. So Jesus invites us: **"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My load is light."**

We exchange the restlessness of our souls for the life giving yoke of obedience to him. That's freedom, that's true life.

So the marks of authentic faith are surrender to the Savior, love for the children of God and obedience to his commandments.

And then finally, as these elements are true in us, we participate in the overcoming victory of Christ.

**"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God"** (vv.4-5).

Three times in these short verses John presses home the point. Do you see it: overcomes the world.

Why do you suppose that John now turns to this theme of overcoming? I think it's because he knows what huge battles we face when we try to live differently from the world around us. To love as Jesus loves and to choose to take an ethical and moral stand in the world places us in the middle of a huge battle. And so first of all, he acknowledges what we're really up against when we purpose to live out an authentic faith. We're up against the world. The world of corporate corruption, the world of airbrushed beauty, the world of pleasure at any price, the world of ambition, the world of greed; we're faced with it every day. We face the temptations to feed every appetite, grab every advantage, follow absolutely every dream - right now - no matter how self-consumed! The battle is unrelenting and fierce, but we overcome by faith in the Son of God.

So John's final words to us this morning are words of comfort and victory to weary warriors in the faith. And he reminds us that the battle isn't really ours; it's his. We simply cling to him. The final passage should read: And who is it who is overcoming

the world; it is he who keeps on believing that Jesus is the Son of God.

It's our faith, our trust, our day-to-day, moment by moment dependance upon the presence and work of Christ in our lives.

Isn't that great? It's not about your effort to obey, it's not about your determination to be nicer to people at church, even though that might be a great thing. It's about dependance upon the one who leads us in victory. Living our lives as a joyous response to his presence, his resources and his grace at work in us.

Do you remember the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus*? There is a great scene where Mr. Holland is meeting with the awkward, redheaded clarinet player named Gertrude Lang. And it just seems that the harder Gertrude tries, the worse she gets. So she announces to Mr. Holland that she giving up the instrument. And he turns to her and says, "Is it any fun? You know what we've been doing wrong Miss Lang, we've been playing the notes on a page. . . there's so much more to music than notes on a page. . . It's about heart, it's about feelings and moving people, and being alive and it's not about notes on a page! I can teach you notes on a page but I can't teach you that other stuff."

And then he asks, "When you look in the mirror, what do you like best about yourself?"

And Gertrude pauses for a minute and smiles and says, "My hair."

"And why is that?"

"Because my father always says it reminds him of a sunset."

And Mr. Holland leans forward and says, "Then play the sunset!" And closing her eyes, fixed not on the notes but on the image of her father's tender affirmation, she plays the piece flawlessly. I think that's a great picture for us this morning of the Christian life.

You see, we can easily become like Gertrude, trying harder and harder, and getting fewer and fewer results from our efforts; becoming more and more discouraged by our lack of progress in these areas. And we need to know just like Gertrude needed to know that the Christian life is not just about playing all the right notes on the page. It's important for us to look in the mirror and respond the affirmation of the Father that we see there. But the beauty we see is not in our pigtails, but it's as we gaze upon the life of Christ in us and the victory of his forgiveness and grace we are set free to really play and joyfully live.

Yes, we need to show up for rehearsal, we need to put the clarinet to our lips, we need to practice our scales. But ultimately it's his victory at work in us, so in faith we have the great joy and privilege to respond to the grace of God at work in us as we play the sunset.

And so this morning we've put ourselves under the expert witness of the scriptures, asking them to reveal whether or not our lives bear the authenticating marks of genuine Christian faith: Belief that Jesus is the Christ, the incarnate Son of God; surrendering our lives to his saving grace; love for the children of God; dispensing his forgiveness and grace to my brothers and sisters, and obedience to his commandments, not like notes on the page, but in a joyous response to the life of Christ at work in me.

And we display these marks, not in self effort but joyously through the one who told his disciples, "Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world."

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