

“God’s Greatness in You” 1 John 4:4

Easter5B18 4-29-18

Testing things is a good way to ensure our physical safety. For that reason engineers test materials used in bridges and buildings. The FDA tests drugs and regulates food production. And courts of law conduct trials to determine whether someone is a threat to public safety. Testing distinguishes between what is true and false.

For our spiritual safety John tells us to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. A false spirit leads us from faith in Christ and endangers our eternal soul. Knowing what a person confesses about Christ distinguishes a false spirit from a true one.

The spirit of the world does not confess Christ as Lord. That spirit is of the devil, the master deceiver. His deception uses the false religions of the world to separate us from our faith in Christ. There is a reason Christianity is singled out from all other world religions for persecution. It is the only threat to the spirit of the world. If you don’t proclaim Christ as Lord, it doesn’t matter what else you confess. Any teaching will do, if it leads people away from truth.

Unfortunately, deception also arises from within the Church, and thus is far more dangerous. I heard three examples this week: An evangelical megachurch preacher near Seattle told people they can believe anything they want about the resurrection of Christ. He isn’t coming back. Their job was to save the planet. Then I listened to a heart-felt testimony of a man whom Christ set free from 25 years of living in a gay lifestyle. He voiced frustrated anger at pastors that did not tell people that freedom from same sex attraction was possible with Christ. Not surprisingly, one of them is that pastor in Seattle. Then I was told of a minister who denies Jesus’ own claim that no one comes to the Father except through Him. That pastor claims that Jesus is being too exclusive and would offend others.

Paul warned Timothy about such false prophets: they have the appearance of the Gospel but deny its power. They confess Jesus, but not His divine nature and purpose to save souls bound by sin. Such Churches will claim they want unity among all faiths, but there is no true unity that does not unite around what is true.

John says that against all false spirits we are victorious. The Spirit of Christ that is in you is greater than the Spirit that is in the world. Your sure defense is your faith in the death and resurrection of Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. John says in chapter 5: *Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

Your faith is the very proof that the Spirit abides in you. Paul wrote that no one can confess Christ without the Spirit. God’s greatness in you is His Spirit that overcomes the false spirit of this world and holds fast to the Gospel.

God’s greatness in you is also evident in the fruit of the Spirit. In today’s Gospel Jesus connects His abiding in us to the bearing of fruit that will last. What does this fruit look like? It looks like love, but Galatians 5 adds to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So here is how you test your own spirit, to see whether Christ abides in you. Does what you trust in bring about the fruit of the Spirit within you? Are you listening to a voice that moves you to be gentle instead of self-righteous, to practice self-control instead of self-promotion or to increase your joy instead of hopelessness? Are you influenced by a person or activity that incites aggression, lust, selfishness, or impatience? Pay attention to your spirit and ask whether that other person professes Christ or whether Jesus is in the activity you engage. Do not let the spirit of the world extinguish the flame of God’s Spirit in you. Greater is God in you than that false spirit that seeks to deceive.

Sadly, none of us always lives as people that have overcome the spirit of the world. We listen to false voices and go astray. Gladly, God’s Spirit calls us back. When His Spirit stirs us to repent, let us not hesitate to confess our sin and our Savior. He is the one way to Heaven, for He alone overcomes guilt and shame by his own sacrifice for sin. He is always ready to forgive all who call upon him for mercy.

Test the spirits of the world. You will find that what they offer is nothing compared to the victory and freedom you already have in Christ. He is God’s greatness in you. Amen.