

+ Lesson Introductions + 11th Sunday after Pentecost: 2012 Hymn Festival + 12 August 2012 +

+ Part I: Christ – My Strength +

1 John 4:7-12 – It all starts with love, but certainly not your love for God. By nature, you and I and everyone else would better be described as “loveless” when it comes to God. By nature, you have no reason to love the holy God who condemns sin, your sin, your selfish thoughts, your hurtful words, your loveless actions. Who could love a God who condemns what you and I love to do? ...But that’s where the love of God is something far different. It’s not like your love or mine—love that’s always looking for what’s in it for me, love that always has a string attached, love that refuses to love the loveless. No, the love of God is the complete opposite—**“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”** That love is free, no strings attached, and that love is yours through faith in the Savior who gave up everything for you. That love of God in Christ Jesus gives you strength when you face temptation or the effects of sin. That love of God in Christ Jesus gives you the strength to **“love one another”**, even the loveless.

Hymn – CW 365 – Love Divine, All Love Excelling

Romans 8:31-39 – What makes you sing for joy when you find yourself in the middle of one of those dark valleys of life or death? After all, there are so many frightening things threatening to overwhelm you! Not enough money here. Job concerns there. Marriage problems and family strife and worries about the kids. Trouble at school, at work, at church. Health concerns for loved ones, for yourself. Ridicule for living out your Christian faith in public. Guilt for past sins or for present sins of weakness. Worries of the present and fears of the future, while death looms in the shadows ready to strike. What makes you sing for joy even in the darkness of this sinful life and amidst the shadows of death? What gives you the strength to cry out into that darkness of worry and fear and pain and sorrow, **“If God himself be for me, I may a host defy!”**? Look to the Word of God and see the God who loves you, who acted on your behalf, who delivered you from that darkness, by enduring the darkness of sin and Satan and death for you. In the midst of the dark valleys of life and death, rejoice because nothing will be able to separate you from your Savior’s love.

Hymn – CW 419:1,2,4,7 – If God Himself Be for Me

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 – When life is hard and filled with difficulty or sorrow or pain or weakness, did you know you don’t have to go back to what you once were? You don’t have to go back to leaning on yourself, because your sins left you all alone. You don’t have to go back to living only for yourself trudging along through this life until death sweeps you away as it has countless other souls. You don’t have to go back, because **“one died for all, and therefore all died”**. Rather than let you plod on to an eternity separated from his love, God **“reconciled the world to himself through Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.”** That means in Jesus you have a new life. You are a new creation. **“The old has gone, the new has come!”** What gives you the strength during those times of weakness so you don’t go back? It’s the blood and righteousness of Jesus that gave you this new life, and it’s the blood and righteousness of Jesus that will see you through this life to eternity.

Hymn – CW 376:1-4 – Jesus, Your Blood and Righteousness

Hebrews 12:1-3 – There is so much that tries to distract you in this life—personal temptations, sins of weakness, attacks on your faith from the world around you or the sinful nature within, subtle things in life that seem to fill up your time without you realizing it. It’s easy to lose focus on what matters most—Christ and his cross. If not for Christ, you’d still be in darkness, powerless to the attacks of sin, with the dirge of death on your lips, but yet take your focus off of Jesus and that’s where you end up. So by faith, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, **“the author and perfecter of our faith”**. See his cross and shame and see he holds the power over sin and death and all those distractions. Don’t give up! Christ is your Strength now and always!

Hymn – CW 402 – My Faith Looks Up to Thee

+ Part II: Christ – My Comfort +

Psalms 23 – One of the most beautiful pictures in all of Holy Scripture is that of a shepherd holding a lamb. It has brought comfort to Christians for centuries. It reminds us of what life is really like for sheep in the flock of the Good Shepherd. It's a life safe in his care. That doesn't mean it's an easy life. Sometimes the Shepherd has to take his sheep through the dark valleys of this life, where doubt and fear and worry and death threaten to attack and overtake them at any time. Always, though, with those everlasting arms, the Good Shepherd is there holding and guiding his sheep never leaving them until they reach the green pastures and quiet waters of his blessing. There are times when your trust in the care of your Good Shepherd is best expressed in words well-known since you were a little lamb. With childlike trust in Jesus, your Shepherd-Savior, let's sing a familiar children's hymn and find comfort in being Jesus' precious lambs and sheep.

Hymn – CW 432 – I Am Jesus' Little Lamb

Psalms 42:4-11 – Sometimes things happen in your life that tempt you to wonder if God is even paying attention. Has God forgotten you? Does he even care? Has God hidden his love to show you his harsh, angry face? Yes, God does allow you to suffer. He allows you to struggle. He allows you to be oppressed. He allows your enemies to prosper. **“Why have you forgotten me, O Lord?”** The complaint rushes up from the depths of your soul, but has he really forgotten? **“Be still, my soul, the Lord is on your side!”** **“Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”** As a child of God, you run back to his promises guaranteed in blood, and you see that even though the Lord has allowed evil to come into your life and may even let things get worse, he never stops loving you because of his grace.

Hymn – CW 415:1,3,4 – Be Still, My Soul

Hebrews 4:14-16 – There are times in your life when you feel alone even when you're with your family or close friends or fellow members here at church. You feel alone because it seems like no one understands what you're going through or what you've been through. When you do find someone who understands, however, what a rush of comfort and reassurance you feel as you share what's going on in your life! Even if you don't, no matter what you're going through, there is someone who can sympathize with what's going on in your life, someone who's been there, who's faced the same temptations, who understands your troubles, who knows you better than you know you. That someone, of course, is your Savior Jesus. Not only does he always listen to you, but he's been there, in your shoes. Not only that, but because of what he's done for you, you have full and complete access to his throne of grace. You can bring him all your troubles. So find comfort in your Savior.

Hymn – TLH 531 – Come, Ye Disconsolate

Revelation 7:9-10, 13-17 – At Baptism, you are placed in the safe, loving arms of your Savior. Through life, you are carried along by the safe, loving arms of the Savior. At the end, you are ushered into glory by the safe, loving arms of the Savior. The life of a Christian can best be described as a “great tribulation” with trouble and hardship from without and within, but a time is coming when that tribulation will come to an end and the only thing that will matter will be Jesus. Only Jesus can remove all the pain and sorrow, hunger and thirst, worry and doubt and fear. Jesus, the Lamb of God, who alone took away your sins, will wipe away every tear from your eyes. In Jesus—your only true Comfort in this life and for the life to come—you will be safe at the end!

Hymn – CW 550 – Behold a Host, Arrayed in White

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Cross of Christ-North Alternate Lesson:

Hebrews 11:13-16 – Hope has always been a hallmark of those who follow Christ. This isn't hope that wishes for something uncertain, but hope for a reality guaranteed by the innocent blood of Christ and his empty tomb. As blood-bought children of God, our hope is not in what might happen or what could take place, but in the guarantee that God will fulfill his promises to us, especially the promise of a heavenly home. Children of God have always found comfort in the hope of that **“better country”** which the Lord has prepared from eternity for us, that **“better country”** where you will live with him for all eternity. Christ is truly your comfort even when death comes knocking at your door. Take comfort, then, because the Lord is on your side and will bring you home to the blessed land of heaven at journey's end! God's Word promises it. Christ's death and resurrection guarantee it.

Hymn – CW 417 – I'm But a Stranger Here