

**Giving up our Lives for God, Country and Neighbors Near and Far
Children's Message from 5/27/18 based on 1John 3:11-18**

The sermon is below the children's message

What is today? What is a memorial? What is a memory? I want to teach you how Memorial Day is connected to Jesus.

I think every Sunday is a Memorial Day. Because we come here to remember and honor Jesus just as Memorial Day remembers and honors our servicemen and women who have died in wars. We remember and give thanks because they were willing to follow Jesus' example of love, which is to give up your own life for others.

Jesus did that on the cross...; he died so that we might have eternal life. And Jesus did it throughout his life as well.

1. He gave his life to the sick and healed them
2. He gave his life to the weak and strengthened them.
3. He gave his life to the poor and sustained them.
4. He gave his life to the sinful and made them righteous.

This is what we remember every Sunday.

Memorial Day is also kind of like the beginning of summer which is a time of renewal and gaining strength back. So as you enjoy your summers, remember those who need healing and strength do something to help them. You are not too young! I saw a video of a little boy who wears a Superman costume while feeding the hungry. You could do that on a Sunday afternoon sometime with your parents in Elizabeth...; we need someone to deliver today by the way.

**The Meeting of God and Humanity in the Body of Christ
based on 1John 3: 11-22, David Jahnke, 5/27/18**

I have talked as of late about the scandal of Jesus being God and God becoming flesh. I read something rather equally jarring with my sons this week, again from the gospel of John, chapter 10. The Pharisees are again giving Jesus a hard time about his claims to divinity. And “³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are “gods”’? ³⁵ If God called people ‘gods,’ people to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside—³⁶ what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?”

I told the boys that Mormons believed that we humans are gods and that I did not think Jesus was a Mormon but that I would look further into it.

We do not like to think of ourselves as gods. It just seems so arrogant and bizarre and unreasonable; even like the original sin of Adam and Eve wanting to be like gods. So I found it rather surprising that a lot of the early Christian patriarchs subscribed to the idea of divinization which says that God became human so that humans might become God.

The biblical foundation for this is mostly in John—like the quote before and the verse from John's epistle which says that when Jesus is revealed will be like him. Well if we will be like him, we will be like God. But God is also identified with love in John's epistle, which makes this more palatable. I think that what is going on is that we were made from Love and for Love; we were redeemed by Love and since Love alone abides eternally, that is what we become a part of.

Now when we reject that God has become flesh, or that flesh can become God (or at least a part of God), we are keeping the two apart. We are saying God is God and humans are humans and never the twain shall meet. But when the two do not meet there is no redemption for humanity. As Paul said to the Corinthian Christians who were doubting the resurrection of the body, if there is no resurrection of the body, then sin was not put to death in Jesus' body and then sin rather God would abide in our bodies.

John's letter was fighting a similar false teaching regarding incarnation. Everyone agreed that Jesus was divine but a group that splintered off came to understand that, since Jesus was God, he could not have really been human; they thought the incorruptible could not take on corruptible flesh. A later heresy would go so far as to believe that Jesus, being God, did not really die on the cross, because God cannot die and God does not have a body.

But whether we are talking about incarnation, crucifixion or resurrection, if God did not take on a human body, encounter sin in our flesh, put it to death and rise up into a new and incorruptible spiritual body connected to the old body, we would remain enslaved by sin. And both Paul and John are clear that that is not the case. We have been set free by Jesus and can now live in constant communion with God's Love and glory.

Two of my friends independently posted pieces about the great 20th Presbyterian pastor Jonathan Edwards who wrote the famous and famously mischaracterized sermon, “Sinners in the hands of an angry God.” The great 20th century theologian and philosopher H. Richard Niebuhr remembered Edwards fondly on the 200th anniversary of his death in 1958:

What Edwards knew, what he believed in his heart and with his mind, was that man was made to stand in the presence of eternal, unending absolute glory, to participate in the celebration of cosmic deliverance from everything putrid, destructive, defiling; to rejoice in the service of the stupendous artist who flung universes of stars on his canvas, sculptured the forms of angelic powers, etched with loving care miniature worlds within worlds. In the light of that destiny, in view of that origin, because of the greatness of that calling, it depressed [Edwards]; it angered him that men should throw away their heritage and be content with the mediocrity of an existence without greater hope than the hope for comfort and for recognition by transient fellow men. Man who had been made to be great in the service of greatness, had made himself small by refusing the loving service of the only Great One; and in his smallness he had become very wicked, covetous of the pleasures that would soon be taken from him. [<https://www.religion-online.org/article/the-anachronism-of-jonathan-edwards/>]

When we doubt that God has become human and that humans can thus participate fully in the life of God, we reduce man to being a beast. And we start down the path of justifying beastly living. And when Christians separate the body from the soul and think that only the soul has been redeemed and the flesh remains corrupted, we are left consciously and unconsciously cynical about human possibilities here on earth. And once again, we end up justifying the status quo of our fallen world, rather than striving for the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

I made my son listen to a Benjamin Gibbard song the other day called Where Soul Meets Body. And I am going to do the same to you:

I want to live where soul meets body
And let the sun wrap its arms around me and
Bathe my skin in water cool and cleansing
And feel...feel what it's like to be new

'Cause in my head there's a Greyhound station
Where I send my thoughts to far off destinations
So they may have a chance of finding a place
where they're far more suited than here

I cannot guess what we'll discover
When we turn the dirt with our palms cupped like shovels
But I know our filthy hands can wash one another's
And not one speck will remain [Death Cab for Cutie from the album Plans]

We have to dig in the dirt like God did when he made humans wonderfully and fearfully. Our hands will get dirty but we will wash each other clean. We must mine for heavenly gold to refine and pave impoverished streets with. We must mine the depths of human wisdom and religious tradition instead of living on the surface level technologically driven media-centered cyber world we inhabit too much.

I saw a great picture of a procession of some sort; and every Gen X and younger person had their phones out to photograph while a grandma alone smiled and directly took in whoever was coming by. We need to meet each other face to face and see each other and talk about our humanity and our God.

John's community was already having to mine for the gold of Jesus and their founder John. Some fifty to sixty years after Jesus' death, community members were already misusing and abusing the tradition which meant that others had to recover it. That's our job now. And I am fearful of what's ahead if we do not do it. Another mass murder in Texas and a recent study of 10,000 cases of women killed between 2003 and 2014, 93% by their husbands and lovers; we have Adma killing Eve and Cain killing Abel left and right.

We need Jonathan Edwards back; we have had two spiritual awakenings in America before and there is no reason we cannot have a third. This will look different; it will involve us discovering the Humanity of God as Karl Barth put it toward the end of his life. It will involve a divine/humanitarian approach to neighbors near and far in need of food and education and health care; we will see and not ignore them any longer. We will fight to make sure everyone gets the material and spiritual goods needed to sustain them here on earth and into eternity. That is the heart of love according to John who tells us today that it is time to start loving not with just our words and our hopes but in action and in truth. May we do so through the one who can do far more abundantly in us than all we can ask or

imagine. To God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, now and forevermore...

Sermon Questions for Reflection and Application

1. The fledgling heresy 1John is combatting is one which said Jesus was a divine being who did not take on flesh because flesh is corrupt and perishable. But God had to become flesh in order to remove what from our flesh?
2. What does Jesus mean when he says we were made to be gods? (See John 10: 46 and Psalm 82:6)
3. What is love according to Jesus?
4. How are we doing in giving up whatever is needed to save others?
5. What happens within us when we realize this?
6. And yet our hearts are comforted why?
7. Does the comforting of our hearts mean they can stay where they are?
8. If we were made to be powerful, eternal, heavenly beings, how can we become what we were made to be? What do we need to commit to?

1John 3:11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹²We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother.

Mark 3:²¹ When his family heard about [all the attention Jesus was getting], they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”²² And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.’ ³³And he replied, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’

9. Who was rejecting the mission of Jesus?
10. Who was Jesus’ new family? Does this mean he rejected his first family?

It seems we have a choice between being like Cain who killed his brother or becoming like Jesus who loves, saved and made one the whole human family.

