

Cooper

1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17
May 5, 2024

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ
Has been born of God, and everyone
Who loves (God) ... loves the children of God ...
For whatever is born of God conquers the world ...
Who is it that conquers the world
But the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.
This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ.

What incredible words these are, and they're left unexplained. So we need to explain them. How is it that just because I believe in Christ, I become born of God; and that being so born, in itself, leads to the love of all God's children, as if loving another is such an easy thing to do, so we need to talk about that; and even more impossible, that being "born of God" means I have conquered the world — Wow! How are we to understand that. And what's this about Christ coming with water and blood? All these words have been rocking around in my head all week, and they have my head reeling. And yet I tell myself, "Burton, you need to preach on this." The things I tell myself. Okay, I'll try. But you'll have to bear with me. I'm sure I'm going to say things, heavy things, that will disturb our traditional way of thinking about our faith. You may have to forgive me for what I say. You'll see.

So, what about belief in Christ leading us to be born of God. What exactly are we believing when we say we believe in Christ. The passage tells us that we are to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. That's not terribly helpful, at least not helpful in a biblical faith. It would make sense in a pagan faith, for there the gods are male and female, they have sexual relations with each other, they have god-sons, god-daughters, they even have sex with mortals, producing children, half divine, half human; but a biblical faith is monotheistic, there's only one God, and this one God is not sexual, not male or female. Christianity, of course, is a trinitarian faith, but it's trinitarianism is monotheistic. I know, that statement is incomprehensible, for there's no logic to it — which is why the Trinity Sunday sermons are such a struggle for preachers, and why we poor people in the congregation suffer so much having to listen to these incomprehensible trinity Sunday sermons, year after year, after year. Okay, Jesus is not literally a Son of God, he is not another divine being in addition to God's divine being. So what do we mean when we say he is Son of God. Actually we believers know what we mean, at least we know it in our heart. We know it every time we read or hear the gospel words, and feel the truth of what Jesus says, feel its authoritative truth, feel its redemptive, healing power; and we know what Son of God means in a worship service, when we receive the sacramental bread, and think of it as Christ's body broken for us, broken because, in Christ, our God of love, shares our sorrow; and we take the wine, thinking of it as Christ's blood, shed for us, shed out of love, God's merciful, forgiving love; and all that is so renewing, I mean feels renewing, so healing, so life-giving; and it's so wondrous that language can never fully express it, so we create language to express our wonder, our gratitude; we say, this must be God's beloved Son, this is God's Word made flesh, this is the second person of the Trinity, this is God's person in two natures, this is the

Prince of Peace, and most significantly of all, we say, this is our Lord, our resurrected Lord, who we know is resurrected because he is with us always — as Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew.

To find ourselves so being, to find ourselves so talking, is indeed to be born of God — and how wonderful that is — and as Jesus tells us in the story of Nicodemus, it is a rebirth, a spiritual rebirth, necessary not only for our sake, but for the sake of human existence itself. For we mortal human beings, so vulnerable, coming out of nothing, seemingly going into nothing, are naturally such anxious creatures, so prone to pursue our self interest, so prone to pursue our survival, even at the expense of others, so we put our needs above others, even to the point of creating disasters for others, horrifying disasters — such as in Gaza, or Ukraine or a school shooting — so, yes, we need to be reborn, to see others as we see ourselves, to know others, to feel others as just as real as we are, as just as valuable as we are, just as loved by God as we are, as much a child of God as we are. And when we so see others, see others as God's children, then we are doing what Christ asks us to do, loving all God's children.

We are ready now to take on that most incredible yet beautiful statement of all, that being “born of God, conquers the world.”

This world, our biblical faith tells us, is good, created good, but it's fallen, it's broken — meaning it's got inherently destructive elements, impulses, in it. So let's talk about how the world, existence, can be good, yet broken, constructive, yet destructive, and I'm going to do that, just to surprise you, by to so much taling about scripture but about that other classic from the ancient world, Homer's Iliad. The Iliad is a tale of war and death, the Greek destruction of Troy and all her people; it tells of warriors, what they love, what they value, what drives them, what they exist for. It's a profoundly moving book, we admire its main characters, the mighty Greek, Achilles, the mighty Trojan, Hector, both caught up in a world of fighting, loving, goodness ... weeping, dying, destruction. Not so unlike our world. And when we ask ourselves what drives this world, what drives these warriors, the answer hits us right ion the face: it's power, this book is all about power, the exercise of power over others, where power is force, coercion where Achilles and Hector are admired for their power, their might in battle, their ability to kill the other, and the more they kill, the more mighty they are, and the more we admire them. And when Achilles kills Hector, it is not only Hector's father that weeps, not only Hector's wife and children that weep, but we weep, we weep not only for Hector but for the inevitable, unavoidable sorrow in life, so much of which we bring upon ourselves: for the very vitality of life, the drive that gives us our sense of living to the fullest, is power, which, if necessary, we will use to the point of force, to the conquest, defeat, death of another who threatens our well being. Life in this world is such a paradox, with a contradiction in its very essence. For it is love, love of our life, love of those we love, that drives us to taking the life of another, of many others, if we are threatened; and the others kill back, also out of love, love of their lives, love of their loved ones..

And the Bible pictures that same world. Apart from Jesus, the most admired figure in scripture is King David, and the first thing we hear about David is that as a boy he killed the mighty Philistine, Goliath; and later we are told that while Saul kills by the thousands, David kills by the ten thousands, so David is the one to be admired most.

And the biblical view of God, in so many places, not in all places, reflects this admiration of power, as if it's God's almighty power that's at the root of our worshipping him. Think

of the Exodus stories, praising God for taking the lives of Egyptian children, praising God for drowning hundreds of Egyptian soldiers, as if those babies don't now have weeping parents; as if those soldiers don't have a weeping wife, weeping children. I'm not a pacifist, I know evil forces arise in our world and sometimes the only way of countering an evil force is by raising a mightier force, and being willing to do terrible things, even taking the lives of others. But we should weep when we do them, not celebrate, we should weep even if we feel it was morally necessary to do them. We should weep, as the Greek written Iliad weeps, even in victory, weeps for the dead Trojan, Hector, weeps for the destruction of Troy and the enslaving of her women. And we should know this, believe this, that when God saw the dead Egyptian children, when God saw the drowning Egyptian soldiers ... God wept. God wept. We know God wept, because we know that God cares for all his children. God is compassion, God is love. That is why we worship God.

Okay, enough, it's time, past time, to come to the good news of our faith, the wonderful good news of our faith. I don't know what we would do without it. We all know the good news: Christ comes into this world, this beautiful world with its tragic mix of good and evil, Christ comes into this world with water and with blood, offering us rebirth, spiritual rebirth, a rebirth of our spirit, a rebirth that works to conquer, to overcome, the destructive elements in the world, the destructive elements in ourselves. For Christ is special, the gospels tell us this by saying he comes with water, baptismal water, for at his baptism, as water pours over him, we can hear, if only we have the ears to hear, we can hear God saying, This is my beloved son, listen to him. And, yes, we should listen to him, for he tells us to love all God's children; we should listen even if sometimes we cannot do that; we should listen because it is only love, all God's children loving all God's children, that can conquer the destructive elements in our ourselves and in our world.

And Christ comes with blood, comes ready, out of God's love for us, Christ does ready to shed his blood on the cross, and we think of that blood as God's blood, that is why we say that Christ is God Incarnate, for the spirit of Christ is God's spirit, God's Spirit suffering for us, God suffers because God his ;love, and love cannot be ondiffert to the sorrows of another, or perhaps I should say, suffering, pain, makes indifference impossible given what is going on in the world; and in breaking that indifference, God offers his spirit to us, the spirit tha tis in Christ, so we can do what Saint Paul asks us to do, to open our spirit to Christ, to let Christ's spirit of love into us, so that we can say as Paul says, that Christ is in us, as least as much as we can let in, for in letting in the spirit of love, we are letting the spirit that can conquer the world, giving us the hope, the blessed hope, to finally, finally, get the darkness out of our world.

Praise Christ for this hope.

Praise God.