

April 6, 2023 – 1 John 5:5-12

St John's Gospel gives us several details about the crucifixion that none of the other Gospels give us. His perspective on the crucifixion is as one who is standing directly at the foot of the cross. Comforting Jesus' mother, Mary. Watching his Lord die.

And so we hear from John this interesting detail in chapter 19: *“30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. 31 Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. 32 So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.”*

Now, John has good reason to recount that Jesus' legs were not broken and that his side was pierced by a spear. Both of these facts are the fulfillment of prophecy, as John will later point out. But what about the giving up of his spirit? What about this flow of blood and water? These are curious details to include. Why?

Well, from a practical standpoint, both are an indication that Jesus is really dead. 'Giving up his spirit' could easily be interpreted as 'he stopped fighting to live'. It is finished. The work of salvation was complete. There was nothing more to do. And so he simply let go of mortal life and allowed himself to die.

Likewise, many theologians and medical professionals have pointed out the biological significance of a flow of blood and water. Blood makes sense, of course. You get stabbed in the side with a spear, you're going to bleed. But the flow of water is also understandable. Death by crucifixion causes both asphyxiation and hypovolemic shock. Two conditions which commonly cause fluid to quickly build up around the heart.

The flow of water is then an indication that the spear had not just caused a superficial wound, but in fact had traveled through Jesus' lung directly into his heart. You can survive crucifixion for a surprisingly long time, but you cannot survive being stabbed in the heart. Jesus was most definitely dead.

So were those John's only goals? To emphasize the fulfillment of prophesy, the completion of Jesus' work of salvation, and the biological indicators of his death? Certainly, those are three very good reasons, and would be plenty on their own.

But John actually gives us another reason for these details. And he does so in our Epistle lesson for this evening. He writes: *“For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.”*

It's an odd passage. Made all the more obscure by John's uniquely poetic language and style. But it is definitely pointing back to the crucifixion. You can't have a passage where John talks about spirit, water, and blood and not be pointing back to one of the climaxes of John's Gospel where he also talks about spirit, water, and blood. So what's the connection?

Well, in this Epistle Lesson from 1 John, he says that the spirit, water, and blood “testify.” What do they testify? That's what the second half of this lesson is about. They testify to the testimony of God. The testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. *“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”*

So the spirit, water, and blood testify that we have eternal life in Jesus Christ. How? How does Jesus giving up his spirit and then water and blood flowing from the spear wound in his side testify to the eternal life we have in him? It's certainly not an obvious connection.

And this where we need to go back to what I originally said about John's Gospel. John has chosen to give us the details that he has. They're not untrue details. They absolutely happened. But John included them in his Gospel account for a reason. So that they might testify to the truth.

And what is the truth? Well, first, that in Jesus' death, we are given his Spirit. We are given the Holy Spirit. Jesus once told his disciples that it is for our benefit that he goes away. That they see him no longer.

Why? Because if he goes, then the Holy Spirit will come. If he finishes this work of salvation, dies, rises again, and ascends into heaven, then he can be with us always. Not just with 12 disciples in Galilee. But with every one of us in every place at every time.

Jesus gives up his Spirit so that we may receive his Spirit. So that he might be with us always. Speaking to us through His Word. Guiding us into all truth. His finished work on the cross is the beginning of our work as the Body of Christ on earth.

And so the Holy Spirit comes to us and He testifies to Jesus. He testifies to salvation through the cross. He testifies to the truth that there is eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Spirit testifies. And the water testifies. Not just the water from Jesus' side, proving that he was really dead. But the water of Holy Baptism that flows from the rock of Christ.

In our Old Testament lesson, the people of Israel grumble because they have no water. But its not really about thirst or the fear of dehydration that they grumble. They grumble because they doubt whether God is really with them. They are testing the Lord, Moses says, by demanding water to drink.

For that, God could have rebuked them. He could have punished them. He could have simply ignored them. But he didn't do any of those things. He gave them water. Water that flowed from a rock.

*“And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?””* Massah and Meribah: quarreling and testing. They wanted to know whether the Lord was among them. They wanted proof, a sign, a seal of God's presence. And they received it in the water from the rock.

Jesus is our water from the rock. He is our proof, our sign, our seal that God is among us. And from his death we receive the water of Holy Baptism. A continuing proof, sign, and seal that God is among us.

You need never doubt whether God is with you, hearing your prayer, granting you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. For the water that flowed from Jesus' side flowed over your head in Holy Baptism. The water, that signified Christ's completed sacrifice for the sins of the world, washed away your sins as well.

The Spirit testifies. The water testifies. And the blood testifies. Blood has always testified to the love of God and the forgiveness of sins. Ever since the Old Testament and the sacrificial system. In fact, the very first festival of Israel was a festival steeped in blood. For it was because of the blood of the lamb spilled on the doorposts of their homes that the angel of death passed over their firstborn.

So also it is because of the blood of Christ, the lamb of God, spilled on the cross, that the angel of death passes over each of us. *“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”* This life is in his blood.

Blood of the covenant. Blood that is poured out for many. Blood that we drink in the supper that our Lord shared with us, his disciples. That very blood testifies to us that we have eternal life. That blood testifies to us the same as the faith given to us by the Holy Spirit and the waters of baptism washing away our sins. These three agree.

They testify that there is life in no one else but Jesus Christ. The Son of God. These three agree that whoever has the Son has life.

When Jesus died on the cross, he gave up his spirit, such that water and blood poured from his side. These were proof of his death. They were the completion of the plan of salvation. They were the fulfillment of prophecy.

But they were one more thing: They were a testimony from God the Father that his Son brings eternal life to all through Spirit, water, and blood. They were a testimony to the marks of the Church. To the means of grace. They were a testimony to the Gospel. Whoever has the Son of God has this testimony in himself. And so tonight, you receive the Son of God in bread and wine, Body and Blood. And so you have that testimony too. Amen.