

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Easter 5

April 28, 2024

Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

Prove it!

—1 John 3:18-24

Prove it! Jesus' enemies were constantly hounding him to prove his identity. "You say you're the Son of God. Prove it! Give us a miracle. Show us a sign." Never mind the fact that formerly blind people were walking around with perfect 20/20 vision. Never mind the fact that once-ostracized lepers had now rejoined society and were living happy, healthy lives. Never mind the fact that thousands of people had seen Jesus perform miracles and come away well-fed. Jesus' enemies, with their stubborn, hard hearts, wanted more. "Prove it!" they said.

But Jesus said, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given, except the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the bosom of the earth." Then Jesus gave them a sign. On the third day he rose from the dead, just as he said, and he proved it. He proved by his resurrection from the dead that he is the Son of God. He proved that the price for the world's sin is paid. He proved that he has destroyed the power of death. Jesus proved that he is the Savior of the world.

The Saint John the Apostle starts today's lesson with a challenge: "*Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*" You love Jesus. You trust in him as your Lord and Savior. You rely on him for forgiveness and salvation. You are a Christian. Prove it! Not with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. So this is what you do. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). Saint John echoes that thought in this letter when he says, "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). So we as Christians don't just worship and praise God on Sunday. We let our Christian light shine on Monday. We don't just say we love Jesus; we show our love for Jesus by loving our neighbor.

But John doesn't stop there. If he did, we would all feel hopeless. Because anyone with a conscience is going to think of the times when we didn't prove it. We didn't let our light shine. I'm going to remember all the times when I broke God's commandments instead of obeying them. John says, "Don't just love with your lips but with your actions," and I think of all the times my actions have been unloving, uncaring, insensitive, hurtful. And if I let that spin around in my mind, Satan, the master of doubt and deception, gets a hold of it and tries to convince me I'm not a Christian. He says, "You haven't proven it. Look at all your sins! Look at how miserably you've failed to measure up to what God wants from you!" and we can easily be overwhelmed by guilt. So John goes further: "*This then is how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.*"

God wants us to know that we are loved and forgiven, he wants us to have the rock-solid confidence that he lives in us and we are his children, but God doesn't want us looking in here (at our own hearts and lives) for the proof of his forgiveness. God doesn't want us to build our hope on how we feel or what we have done or failed to do. God wants us to look out there (at the cross and empty tomb of Jesus) for the assurance of our forgiveness. When we want proof that we are Christians God continually directs our gaze outward. He refocuses our attention not on everything we've done for Jesus but on everything Jesus has done for us. When we are strong in faith our eyes are fixed unwaveringly on Jesus, and when our eyes are fixed squarely on Jesus, then we obey God's commands and love our neighbor without even thinking about it, because it's just what we do. Remember Jesus' words: "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me you will produce much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

So this is God's command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. This is the proof that God lives in you: he has given you his Holy Spirit. The Spirit points you to Jesus, and in Jesus you find the proof of where you stand with God. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Your sins are forgiven. The proof is in Jesus' cross and resurrection from the dead.

Do you want to prove to the world that you're a Christian? Most Christians I know don't go out and preach on a street corner. You just go about their daily lives focused on Jesus. You show your love for Jesus in your kindness, your generosity, your caring, your giving of your time, your compassion, listening to those who are hurting, showing genuine interest in others. You do your job faithfully, you give your best to your employer, you care for your family. You show small acts of kindness to people who are hurting, a word of encouragement to those who are down. You're not flashy or outspoken—you certainly don't go through life saying, "Look at me!"—but with your Christian life, your behavior that's not contrived or forced, with a positive attitude that's inspired by the Holy Spirit who lives in you, and with a heart that is at peace in Jesus, you love in Jesus' name—not with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. Amen.