

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Easter 7/Ascension
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Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
God be with you in love

— 1 John 4:13-21

The Lord be with you! Those are fitting words as I say good bye you and go and serve the Lord in another corner of his kingdom. I've exchanged similar words with many of you over the recent weeks. Many of you have lovingly said, God be with you. And I can't help respond with, "And also with you."

God be with you. What do we mean by that? It's certainly a wonderful thing for one Christian to say to another. It's more than just an expression wishing each other well. It's far more certain than saying, "Good luck!" No we can confidently say, "God be with you." to each other. And when we say that to each other, there's no "maybe." It's not just wishful thinking. It is certain hope that God is and will be with us. As much as we say "God be with you" do we trust and realize that he is indeed with us?

It's only natural for those who don't know Christ to perceive God as distant and disconnected. We can easily slip into that old, natural way of thinking too. Maybe sometimes it's the result of shame and sin which separates from God. How could God be with me? Why would he want to come and dwell in me? Maybe other times it's wishful thinking. If I perceive God as far a way and distant, and not all that involved in my life, I can call my own shots. I can blaze my own trail and hopefully God will glance down at just the right time and catch me doing something good and be pleased, and we can keep doing our own things. Yet other times, Maybe it seems as though you are alone, or even forgotten. It could be during times difficulty in life. No one else knows what you're going through, and that chilling thought crosses your mind—does God know what's going on in my life? Does he care?

It's easy for us to say "God be with you," but in practice it's easy to forget and trust that God is indeed with us. Remember, that's Satan's number one tactic—to cause doubt. Can't you picture him saying like he said to Eve in the Garden, "Did God really say?" "Is God really with you?" How do you know?

But don't listen to him. Listen to John. Throughout John's first letter answers those very questions. Over 15 times in this short letter, John asserts, "We know." And two of those show up on our lesson for today: **"We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us."**

We know. We know with certainty that we are really forgiven children of God. We know that we have God's love. We know that God is present, active, and so intimately involve in our lives. We know that we live in him and he in us. We know. Someone might look at those statements and say, "Well isn't that arrogant. Who do you think you are?" We know who we are. We are children of God. It would be arrogant if we patted ourselves on the back and said, "I know that God loves me because I'm a lot better than most people and I do a lot of good." Or it would be arrogant if we said, "I know that God is present in my life I keep my act clean, I'm successful." But our certainty does not come from us and who we are and what we do. It comes from God and who he is and what he has done.

We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. In your baptism, the triune God came to live in you and you in him. With a flood of his grace, through water and the Word that barrier of sin was demolished and washed away. God gave you his Spirit to create and strengthen your faith so that you don't have to guess or wish, but so that you can know that you have a right relationship with God. And if that question still lingers, "How do I know?" We know because **the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.** God himself came to be with us and to dwell among us, not just in Spirit, he didn't just glance down from heaven to check in. He came in humility. He came in the flesh. Jesus came to meet us where we were at, lost and condemned creatures. And he laid down his life for us. He loved the world. He loved you enough to die in your place to make you right with God. This is how we know that God forgives us. This is how we know that God loves us. This is how we know that we live in him and he in us.

"How can you know?" We live in a world that is always searching and hoping, but never truly knowing. Have you listened to how the world talks about spiritual truths? I've noticed this—their statements are a lot more tentative. "I think that God..." or "I feel like God is..." and what follows is speculation or wishful thinking of how God maybe works. But when Jesus comes into our lives and shows what he's done and when he gives his Spirit

that assures us that we are God's children, we can say, "I know." A couple of weeks ago, Pastor Pufahl sang a children's song in his sermon—"Jesus loves me this I know." Can you imagine if we sang, "Jesus loves me this I think..." Little children can confidently sing Jesus loves me this I know!

Knowing this simple truth makes all the difference. John says, ***If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.*** It comes down to that. We know and we rely on God's love. God's love is the answer to all doubt in life. God's love is the answer to all fear in life.

John says, ***God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.*** Why does God come to dwell with us in love? Why does he fill our hearts and lives with his love? Because his perfect love drives out fear. Can you picture a small child frightened nearly to death? He's separated from his parents, or for the one hundredth time he does what he's not supposed to and his conscience scares him to death, but his mom or dad pick him up and wraps him in the tightest of hugs and simply says, "I love you." and the fear melts away. Fear has to do with punishment, but perfect love drives out fear. God's love is perfect. It's so perfect it drives out fear. When doubt and fear enter your hearts, God be with you. Remember God is in you. He's picked you and wrapped you in the warm embrace of his love. His love that drives out all fear and doubt.

God be with you in love. God is with you. God is in you. God is among us. How do you know? Again our world operates based on what it sees and on what's tangible. We often can fixate on what we see right in front of us. We don't see God face to face right now. But we see his love. This love of God that fills our hearts is very real and tangible. When we love and when we are loved by fellow Christians, this is tangible proof that God is in us and we are in him because ***God is love. We love because he first loved us.***

When we say to each other, "God be with you," we can know and be certain that he is. And this is how we know: ***God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us.*** I've seen God's love here at Emmanuel since day one through the love that you have shown to me and my family. I have seen God's love as you love your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in so many ways. In every kind word, in every warm hello, in patience, in going out of your way to encourage and provided physically and spiritually for your brothers and sisters in Christ, the love of God is made complete among us.

All of you will always have a very special place in my heart. I will take so many good memories and experiences with me. I will think about you. Many of you have told me, "You'll be in our thoughts and prayers. We'll be thinking about you." But the most comforting thing we can confidently say to each other is, "God be with you!" The Lord is not going anywhere. He was here at Emmanuel when I got here, and he's here to stay. Remember the Lord is not far away. In Jesus Christ, it's not a long distance relationship. ***We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.***

God be and remain with us in love. Amen.