

Sermon about 1 John 1, 1-4 on Candlemas 2026

Blessing: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Bible: (1) Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (2) Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (3) Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, (4) and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, (5) and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (6) For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— (8) but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (10) For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (11) More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we ask for the Holy Spirit. Let this word not return empty, but transform our hearts.

Sermon: Dear congregation... this is a common greeting for a sermon. Dear congregation. This refers to you. You? Perhaps me too? All of us? Yes, that's right, dear congregation! What is that, dear congregation? I would like to examine this in more detail with you now and in the coming weeks, because I feel that it is not so clear.

The congregation here is the church. And the church is not just any institution under Belgian law or tradition. 'I believe in the one, holy, - in the original - catholic (that is, all-encompassing) church,' we profess in the creed, and you confirmands must learn this. I do not believe 'in the church,' but 'I believe the church'! The church is something that God has created. A place of divine law, a holy place. You cannot see it, you cannot regulate it. But you can belong to it locally, namely in the congregation. This is where the church is – because God's word is preached purely and the sacraments are administered properly, as stated in the Lutheran confessions. So it is not a club, not an interest group, and please not just tradition or even habit. What happens here is the most important thing in life! This is about our lives and our souls and those of our children!

How do you belong? Through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ! And that pays off. The Apostle Paul opens up two perspectives. First: because we believe that Jesus Christ died for us and cleared away everything that stood between God and us, we are righteous before God. This gives us peace with God. And because we are at peace with God, we have access to grace, that is, access to heaven, where there will be no more injustice, suffering, crying, pain or tears. It will be wonderful, and that is why we can have hope, which enables us to get up every morning and not lose heart in life, despite what we see in the news. That is why we can rejoice: we know of a hope that the world does not have and cannot give. If one does not believe in God, life leads only to death and decay. And on closer inspection, there are no compelling reasons why life should be worth protecting at all.

The second perspective seems somewhat strange at first glance, but a look at other parts of the world confirms this as well: we live in affliction. But in faith, these can be patiently endured, because we share a hope for a good future with God. That allows us to prove ourselves. Of course, this also works for us here,

but it is especially true for our sisters and brothers in faith who live and suffer persecution because of their belief in Jesus Christ. It is particularly among them, for example in North Korea or in the Muslim world, that one finds especially strong faith.

But why is this so? Because God has given us his love through the Holy Spirit; poured into our hearts, writes Paul. That is faith – feeling that you are loved by God and dependent on him in a positive sense. He carries us and guides us through life, however difficult it may sometimes be.

What is special – and no other religion in the world can offer this – is that God acts first: he does not love you because you love him or because you are such a wonderful person! It is not about who you are and what you can do – you, with your quirks, you with your difficult family situation, with your limited time, with your stressful job, with your unhappy past and perhaps also present, you with your illness, you with your loneliness. Nor is it about your lack of happiness or your sadness. All of this keeps us from salvation, from hope, from patience. All of this causes us distress. Yes, even godlessness and enmity towards God. Yes, exactly, enmity! Because all of this, whether intentional or simply a result of life, whether you are the perpetrator (and yes, you are, time and again) or the victim, takes hold of you. And with that, we no longer truly trust in God and all is lost. We then become enemies of life, enemies of God, unable to enter his kingdom. As harsh as that sounds and as sad as it is.

Nowadays, many people may say: God is not a loving God if he does not save you. Then we must say: Wait a minute, think about it first! God is there, standing there with his arms open. It is you who does not want to take refuge in them. That is a big difference! It is not God who casts you out. It is you who closes the door behind you.

But all is well for us here in the church: for God knew this beforehand. He knew of your weakness and mine, of our enmity towards him. We are not the only ones... But, as I said, God does not want this, does not want things to come to extremes for you and me. That is why he has made provision. In the Gospel (John 3:16-18) we heard: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And Paul says: God did this while we were still enemies – in advance. Because he let his own life be sacrificed.

If he gave so much, then he will not let it go to waste now. You cannot simply be written off like an old car or piece of furniture. It is never too late for that.

We are here to hear and internalise this message, to be uplifted and strengthened by it. That is why we are a congregation, God's church here in this place. A congregation is a community of losers and sinners who can nevertheless rejoice. For God loves us and has saved us. Dear congregation, let us remember this message again and again and take it seriously. This is important. But it is something really good.

Blessing: The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Amen.)