

1 John 1:1-2:2
“Walking in the Light”
St. John, Apostle & Evangelist

December 27, 2020
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

A small child was taken to a cathedral. She sat watching the sunshine through the windows. She then asked her mother, “What are these people on the windows?” Her mother replied, “They are saints.” “Now I know what saints are. They are the people who let the light shine through.”

This morning, the Third Day of Christmas, the Church celebrates one of those saints who let the light shine through – St. John, the Apostle and Evangelist.

John – a fisherman by trade – was among the first whom Jesus called to be an apostle. In his Gospel, John often refers to himself as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved,*” which tells of a close friendship between himself and Jesus. John was also the only one of the Twelve not to abandon Jesus during the hours of His suffering and death. When all looked doubtful, he remained faithful. Together with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, he stood at the foot of the cross. It was there that Jesus gave His mother into John’s keeping and gave John to Mary as her own son.

According to Early Church tradition, Mary lived with John in Ephesus until the day of her death. Also, according to tradition, John was the only one of the Twelve who did not die a martyr’s death. Although, he suffered a time of exile upon the island of Patmos during which the great revelation was granted to him.

John died as an old man, but his Holy Spirit-inspired writings – First, Second, and Third Epistles of John; Revelation; and the Gospel of John – continue to be a bright shining light in the Church and serve as the Holy Spirit’s encouraging words to us always.

[False Teachings]

Now, some years ago, an article called “Pick-and-Choose-Christianity” appeared in a major national magazine. This article summarized the results of a three-year-study of all denominations in a midwestern state. This study pointed out that most church members “pick and choose” which teachings of Christianity they will accept and which they will leave behind. One of the most popular teachings that was disregarded was sin. A third of respondents said they were prone to mistakes, but they did not think of themselves as sinful.

In our reading from 1 John this morning, the Apostle John is putting his hearers to the test. As the last living apostle, he has become increasingly aware of errors finding their way into Christ’s Church. These errors are not minor issues. These errors are a matter of life and death.

Now, John’s focus in our reading today is the need for a savior. You see, these false teachers were proclaiming that there is no sin. They were teaching the heresy known as antinomianism, which dismisses the Law of God in the life of the Christian. To put it short and simple, antinomianism means it does not matter how you live. So, when it does not matter how a person lives – when everything is fine – why is there any need for a savior?

So, John’s principal concern is to reinforce faith and life in Christ’s flock against the threat of this deceiving influence that is coming in from outside the Church. Here, John is being a loving and caring pastor in testing them that they are indeed walking on the right path.

You see, sin is very real. Sin isn’t a thing made up by the Church to deny people any sort of enjoyment. As human beings, we often like to just dismiss sin, or just avoid the term altogether by calling sin a mere mistake or a poor choice, or use the acronym “YOLO” – *you only live once* – as an excuse for bad or risky behavior. Today’s popular excuse is: “What I do in my life should not concern you.” But like any virus, sin spreads. Discussing sin is uncomfortable. Discussing sin is unpleasant. This is likely why these false teachers then and now just dismiss sin.

But for God, sin is a big deal. Sin is an extremely big deal, since it is us separating ourselves from the love of God. Now, ever since Adam fell into sin, humankind has been stuck in the pit of sin and unable to save ourselves. Instead of loving God by following His commandments, all we do is dig ourselves deeper and deeper into sin.

Like all of us, John also was not perfect. He too was sinful. Like us, John needed salvation.

Thanks be to God the Father that He did not leave us to die in our sins, which we all deserve, instead He sent us the Savior. He sent us the Savior Jesus Christ – the Word made flesh – to be born of the virgin Mary. He sent His only-begotten Son to take upon Himself all our sins to the cross – *every sin of thought, word, and deed against God's command* – so that anyone who would believe in Him would be saved from the power of sin, which is eternal death. He came as the only Savior from sin. No good works and no other religion have the power to save. He came so by grace through faith in Him, we would not walk in the darkness of our sins, but instead walk in the righteousness of His Light.

This is why John is proclaiming the need for salvation. Since, he had salvation through the blood of Jesus, he shared this good news. All throughout John's life, he repented of his sins. He received forgiveness. He grew in the one true faith.

[Walking in the Light]

In our text, John is confronting his flock with this question: Are you walking in the darkness or are you walking in the light? Now, to walk in darkness is to live in sin and death. But what exactly does it mean to walk in the light? John tells us: We repent and confess our sins.

For most of us, this middle part of our epistle is a part of our muscle memory. We know this by heart. Sometimes the meaning of Confession and Absolution may just pass us by, but through our confession, we receive forgiveness. Our sin is wiped clean through the merit of Jesus. So, when you are absolved of your sins, it is Jesus doing this work – for you. This passage from 1 John is one of the ways in our liturgy that we confess our sins in the Divine Service to God our Father. But have you ever thought about the meaning behind it?

You see, these false teachers were proclaiming that they had fellowship with God. These false teachers were proclaiming that they had no sin. By denying sin, they were denying the saving power of Jesus Christ. These false teachers were in fact leading their hearers to eternal death apart from God, since the only way we come to fellowship with God is through the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

For these lies, John proclaims: ***“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us”*** (1 John 1:6-10).

You see, none of us is perfect, except for Jesus Christ. As imperfect human beings, Christ alone has the power to make us perfect. He came to earth, so that through His cleansing blood in His atoning death, everyone who would believe in Him would have life. He came to earth as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

[Children of the Light]

Like John, we are also people who let the light of Christ shine through. We are witnesses of what Christ has done! Through God’s Word (the Bible), we hear the voice of Christ – the same voice that John heard. Through Confession and Absolution, we hear this same voice of Christ as He forgives our sins. And at the Lord’s Supper, we see, touch, and taste the same body and blood of Jesus that John witnessed being shed upon the cross and alive in the flesh again with His resurrected body.

As witnesses of Christ, we too have changed. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit has worked the new creation in us beginning at our Baptism. By grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we have become Children of the Light, we have nothing to fear, not even temporal death, since we have the sure and certain hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Through Christ’s Light that we shine in our daily lives – our daily vocations – we live out our lives proclaiming Christ.

As Children of the Light, our Christian life is not hidden. As Jesus says in Luke 12:35: We ***“stay dressed for action and keep our lamps burning.”*** By keeping our lamps burning, we do not live our Christian faith in private. In fact, our Christian faith is for all the world to see! Now, we don’t scream our faith through a megaphone, but we live our faith in what we think, say, and do. Christ shines through us as we live out our faith by proclaiming Christ in our daily actions and our daily vocations. This can be as simple as inviting friends to church, so others can hear the good news of Christ’s forgiveness.

As forgiven sinners, we try to follow God's Law. We try the best we can. We try, try, and keep trying.

And when we fail and fall into any kind of sin, remember ***“we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”*** (1 John 2:1). So, we repent and confess that sin to God our Father and that sin is forgiven. Through your confession, you are forgiven by God the Father through the blood of Jesus.

Now our life is a struggle, the devil constantly entices us with the world and our flesh to sin. But, by God's grace, we have the remedy for sin and this remedy is Jesus Christ. This is why He came. He came to save us from our sins. He came so that we would have life everlasting.

To sustain our weak faith, Jesus instituted the New Testament in His blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sin and to strengthen our weak faith. In the Sacrament of the Altar, He grants us to drink His blood, which redeems, purchases, and wins from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, strengthening and preserving both body and soul to life everlasting. All this He accomplishes, all this He procures, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.

This Christ alone has done for you and me, so that we would walk safely in His light. Through Christ alone, we are His chosen and redeemed children. This is most certainly true. ***“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen”*** (Revelation 1:5b).

Through Christ's cleansing blood, we no longer live in darkness, but live in His light as we receive the benefits of His cross: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We walk in His Light as we confess our sins, receive His forgiveness, and share the love of Christ with our neighbor. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠