

April 8, 2018

EASTER 2B -2018 (1 John)

Acts 4: 32-35

Psalm 133

1 John 1:1-2:2

John 20:19-31

The Good News that we hear in the Easter season Gospels confirm the TRUTH of the resurrection and serve as models for our own encounters with the Risen Christ. In Eastertide, we celebrate the new life we have because Christ won victory for us and for the world. This is the season for Christians to look redeemed—to show forth the peace of God, given through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus to each of us. Easter changed the world and the relationship between God and creation, bringing it back to wholeness. It changed the disciples, including Thomas, from sorrowing and lost men and women into apostles who spread the Good News around the world. The Kingdom of God was inaugurated in Jesus Christ and continues to flourish and spread through the power of the Holy Spirit in and through our own

lives. Beginning with the men and women who directly experienced the risen Jesus, the Christian life has flourished in every generation, including here in this year 2015 and in this place in Southern Ocean County, New Jersey!! As an Easter people, we join with Christians in the Church Universal to make our way together as the witnesses to the resurrected Christ, the Savior of the world.

This is often no easier for us than it was for those first disciples. From the very beginning, the followers of Christ have had disagreements and differences. They had to decide how to unite and move forward as Christ's witness to the world. Today and for the next six weeks, the second reading will be from the First Letter of John. At the same time, you all are encouraged, instructed, invited to be reading the Book of Acts with the Good Book Club. Together, these two books show a picture of how the church of Jesus Christ began and struggled with disagreements along the way.

Jesus told Thomas things would change and that people who had not seen him directly would believe and live transformed lives in His name!! By and large, people see the resurrected Jesus through the Church and the people in the church.

Let's start with a little background about the First Letter of John. There are four short letters together just before the Book of Revelation at the end of the Bible – 1 John, 2 John, and 3 John and Jude. 1 John is believed to have been written in the city of Ephesus around 100 AD, now called CE for Common Era. We are not sure who was intended to receive this message. Many of the Christians in Ephesus and other towns were 2nd and 3rd generation Christians. The thrill and excitement of the earliest church was over. Many felt like the requirement that they be “saints”, becoming holy, was a burden. The idea that Christians were called to be “in the world, but not of the world” did not have the same appeal. No one

really wants to be different than the culture around them.

There were new, exciting teachers around Ephesus. Their idea was that the body was bad, while the spirit was good. Christianity needed reformed to focus on the “spiritual”, not the physical. For some, it meant extreme asceticism – fasting and celibacy. For others, it meant fulfilling every bodily desire, since only the spiritual mattered. Often in practice, the new teachings meant worrying about intellectual learning, but behaving badly to one another.

At least some of the teachers denied that Jesus was the Messiah, in large part because a crucified Messiah was so out of popular expectation. And Jesus’ failure to return quickly made people doubt that he had been what the early church believed and taught. This left followers of Jesus open to doubt and wandering from the true faith and practice taught by the apostles. The writer of 1 John emphasized two

primary ideas about God – First, God is Light and not darkness. God is love and not hate.

Regarding Jesus, he insists that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. At the same time, he believes that Jesus was fully human and suffered as we would suffer. Because Jesus suffered and died for our sins, because he rose again, God and humans can be reconciled. This is what makes Jesus the Saviour of the world.

The world in which the early Christians lived was a hostile one. It hates Christians, as it hated Christ. The power of “the evil one” is strong. It takes a stronger faith in God to overcome evil. Yet, the book is sure that there is no need for despair and fear, because this world is passing away, to be replaced by the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Light has already won over darkness and the True Light, Christ, already shines.

First John also has much to say about practical living in this world where evil still has much power.

More than any other New Testament writer, this John stresses the need of Christian fellowship. The essence of Christianity is to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and to love one another. God has loved us, and we are to love one another. We prove we love God by the love we show to one another. In John's view, this love is not a sentimental emotion, but a dynamic and practical relationship that includes help with basic needs.

At the beginning of this book of the Bible (the part you have in your leaflet, the author sets out his purpose and defends his credentials. He writes about what he himself saw and heard, his own experience. He believes that his message will bring joy!!

He defines the God he writes about. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. To be in fellowship with God, Christians must walk in the light. This is not a message about "walking on the sunny side of the street", but a message about being devoted to the good and true, to the will and ways of

God, as set forth in scripture and the life of Jesus. There is an emphasis in First John on the moral life, doing good, not just thinking the right things. In the New Testament, the verbs used with the word TRUTH are obeying the truth or following the truth. On the other hand, there are warnings about opposing the truth or wandering from the truth.ⁱ

Truth creates fellowship. No Church can be exclusive and still be the church of Christ. People are drawn together if they are walking in the light of God. We will talk more about this idea of fellowship in the upcoming weeks.

Truth also brings Christ to clean and change our lives. The insert reads: “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” What William Barclay says this means is: *“If you really know what the sacrifice of Christ has done and are really experiencing its power, day by day you will be adding holiness to your life and becoming more fit to enter the presence of God.”*ⁱⁱ

In verses 8-10, the writer points out two possible mistaken ways of thinking. These ways of thinking keep us from the truth and shroud us in darkness. One is to think we have no sin. This usually means we make excuses or blame other people or blame our circumstances. If you say you have no sin, you are a liar and you are calling God a liar. We must own up to what we have done wrong AND the things we have not done that God asked us to do. Sin is falling short of the mark, the target set by God. All of us fall short. John says that by the very act of confessing, admitting our sin, we open ourselves to God's forgiveness. God in God's own righteousness has promised to forgive us if we ask. We can start fresh any time, but we must start by admitting where we are starting from, a place of sin.

The portion of 1 John in today's leaflet concludes with a pastor's concern for the flock: "Little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. But, if you do...Jesus will cover them, has

already paid the price, will make you righteous, as he is righteous.

The point of this passage is to make sure that Christians do not take sin lightly. Do not ignore the log in your own eye, while taking note of the splinter in someone else's. Admit your own sin and move forward in better direction. God will give you love and grace and fellowship in your new start.

In these verses, Jesus is called our "Advocate" with the Father. New Jersey has a program called "Child Advocate" for children in the foster care system. The Advocate is a volunteer who shows up and argues before any authority- parents, judge, social workers, for the child's benefit and best interest. The Advocate assures the best outcome for the child. Jesus serves as our Advocate. Satan in the Bible is often called "The Accuser". Jesus defends us and protects us against any accuser. The word Advocate implies someone with the skills and knowledge to present our case boldly and accurately to the

authorities, while serving as a comforter and encourager to each of us.

The other phrase in these verses that is “atoning sacrifice”. The word is important, and another translation is one familiar to devotees of Rite 1. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. The word “propitiation” is hard to translate in to modern English concepts. The best explanation I saw is that, through Jesus, guilt from our past sins and any defilement of our nature from sin is covered and removed, so that God sees us as holy and pure. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the whole world.

1¹⁻² From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we’re telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us.

3-4 We saw it, we heard it, and now we’re telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy!

⁵This, in essence, is the message we heard from Christ and are passing on to you: God is light, pure light; there's not a trace of darkness in him.

⁶⁻⁷If we claim that we experience a shared life with him and continue to stumble around in the dark, we're obviously lying through our teeth—we're not living what we claim. But if we walk in the light, God himself being the light, we also experience a shared life with one another, as the sacrificed blood of Jesus, God's Son, purges all our sin.

⁸⁻¹⁰If we claim that we're free of sin, we're only fooling ourselves. A claim like that is errant nonsense. On the other hand, if we admit our sins—make a clean breast of them—he won't let us down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing. If we claim that we've never sinned, we out-and-out contradict God—make a liar out of him. A claim like that only shows off our ignorance of God.

***2** ¹⁻²I write this, dear children, to guide you out of sin. But if anyone does sin, we have a Priest-Friend in the presence of the Father: Jesus Christ, righteous Jesus. When he served as a sacrifice for our sins, he solved the sin problem for good—not only ours, but the whole world's..ⁱⁱⁱ*

Jesus solved the whole world's problem. That's why Easter is such good news. That's why I am working hard to help you understand what it means and what it offers. That's why you need to tell other people about the joy that Jesus brings to your life.

Take some time to re-read your insert this week. God is speaking to you, with love and offer of forgiveness and an invitation to a fresh start. Always and evermore. Amen and Alleluia!!!

ⁱ Barclay, p 28-29.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 31

ⁱⁱⁱ The Message