

April 15, 2018

EASTER 3B – 2018

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

1 John 3: 1-7

Luke 24:36b-48

Happy Easter!! It is the season of the joyous resurrection of the Christ beyond the Jesus of the cross and tomb! But it is also the time when we are studying the scriptures about the meaning of the resurrection, when we are waiting to be fully instructed and empowered to live out our own witness to the resurrected Christ in the flames of Pentecost. We are asking the questions about what Jesus' resurrection means to my life and my community and how can we bring the Easter joy to those around us? What is God's plan for us as Easter People, Jesus' people in a world that may not know or care what we believe.

We continue this morning looking at the First Letter of John. In the second Chapter, which the lectionary skips, the writer recalls the New Commandment given by Jesus at the Last Supper: **Love one another, as I have loved you.** This was Christ's new mandate, given as he washed the disciple's feet and fed them the sacred bread and wine. It is at the heart of our relationship with God.

John makes it clear that loving in a general way is not enough. We must love our family, our neighbors, the people that appear before us in the line at Acme. Our love must be lived and given. If we do not, we are blind and left in the darkness of sin. To encourage us, John reminds us of God's great gifts to his people. To enable us to live in God's love, we are given the forgiveness of sins, increasing knowledge of God, and the power of God to overcome temptation and evil.

At the end of Chapter 2, John writes about those who have left the church. Then, as now, disagreements lead to separation. He reminds the faithful that their obligation is to Jesus, to put into practice the truth as they understand it. That includes loving all their neighbors, within and without the church. He encourages the faithful to "abide in Christ", living in a way that we need not be afraid or ashamed if Jesus were to return today.

As we move into Chapter 3 and today's reading, John begins to speak deeply about our relationship with God. **"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God."** The message this morning is clear: **"Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed."** No matter where we are on our Christian journey, or general journey of life; our future has possibility and is not fully known. It has not yet been revealed. I'm feeling this deeply these

days and I think many of you feel the same way. It is a time of change for many of us. Whatever else changes, we will still be children of God.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu used an image from a book by the North Carolina Episcopal lay teacher, Verna Dozier, to create a children's book, called God's Dream. Close your eyes and listen to this book which cherishes you as part of God's family. [Read]ⁱ

Children grow up and the future of each of our lives is uncertain. The writer of First John has several things to say about what the future holds for us, even if some things remain unknown:

- **When Christ appears in glory, we will be like him.** Just as the first Adam and Eve were created in the image of God; our resurrected bodies will be glorified, as Jesus' was.
- **When Christ appears, we will SEE him.** We will be in direct relationship with God, able to apprehend him in the new way of glory.

This is the Christian hope and the TRUTH that the resurrection at Easter made possible. First John is about keeping us looking toward the future promised by God, not letting ourselves be distracted by the pleasures and attractions that are of this world, things that will not last or truly satisfy us. To that end, we are called to keep ourselves "pure". This is the reason we resist temptation and follow the way of Jesus' teaching.

Sin is simply obeying one's own desire rather than following God's instructions. Christ died to take away the sin of the world, but we insist on bringing in back by our own thoughts, words and actions. We do this because of our human nature and because we are tempted by the evil forces that oppose God and God's ways.

What John is looking for are Christians who no longer sin as a matter of course. Our lives are to be deliberately pure and holy. We will, of course, sin, and it should be a matter of remorse, confessions and be followed by a time of renewed connection and devotion to the ways of God.

The message is that we are children of God, and that is enough. Stay that path and all will be well. I ran across the Children's Catechism used by the Presbyterian Church as a teaching tool.ⁱⁱ These are the first five formal things taught to children about God. They are what First John is trying to teach us. Read me the answers to these questions from your bulletin:

Question 1. Who are you?

I am a child of God.

Question 2. What does it mean to be a child of God?

That I belong to God, who loves me.

Question 3. What makes you a child of God?

Grace -- God's gift of love that I do not deserve and cannot earn.

Question 4. Don't you have to be good for God to love you?
No. God loves me in spite of all I do wrong.

Question 5. How do you thank God for this gift of love?
I promise to love and trust God with all my heart.

Easter tells us that Christ is risen, he is among us and with us and for us. God's mission is still being revealed and we are being called to join in Jesus' work in the world around us. We are in the family business and that is the Good News business. Now, in the days to come and forever, we are God's children and we are powered by the Spirit of God's love. Be fully who you are and do not be afraid. Christ has overcome fear and death with light and love. You can, too. **AMEN and ALLELUIA.**

ⁱ God's Dream, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton Abrams

ⁱⁱ Belonging to God: A First Catechism Approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)