

Written Copy: 1 John 1:1-3 “Amazing Lifechanging Testimony”

2nd Sunday of Easter

Sunday, April 7th, 2024

Text: 1 John 1:1-3

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Exegetical Statement

John writes to the Christian Church beset by heresies over Jesus' incarnation to testify to the truth that He and the other Apostles are eyewitnesses and “ear-witnesses” to. They saw Him as a true man, yet saw, heard, looked intently upon and touched the risen Christ. This is what John proclaims to the Church throughout time in this letter, and that through the Risen Christ life (spiritual and physical) was made manifest and is offered to all who believe. This is life lived with the Triune God now and forever in eternal life to come. And this life lived in faith toward Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for all sin, that in His shed blood we are completely forgiven and cleansed of all the charges of violating God's will. In this baptismal faith and in this forgiveness proclaimed through Confession and Absolution we are united together as the One Body of Christ, the Church in the special communal fellowship and partnership of the Spirit to function as His witnesses. We work together to share this faith and forgiveness with one another, to build each other up, so that we can go out and proclaim this testimony to the unbelieving world through selfless works of love.

Focus Statement:

Jesus' Resurrection is proof positive that He is the atoning sacrifice for all mankind. We need not fear wrath from God since Jesus stood in our place and took it all. Just as He came to His disciples and made them eyewitnesses to His resurrection, He comes to us and breathes on us the Holy Spirit in baptism. Through their testimony and the power of the faith created and maintained by the Spirit through the apostolic witness we are united in communal fellowship and participation as the Body of Christ who can confess our sins and hold fast to the absolution as Christ's words that do what they say in our hearts and life.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

On our own we struggle to believe in the Resurrection and the complete forgiveness that comes from Christ as our atoning sacrifice for sin. We can see God as angry with us and wanting to get even with our continued sin, so we fear being open and honest about our sinfulness. Our sinful hearts don't like to admit fault so we blame others for our sins against our fellow man.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Walk together as His body, forgiving one another as He forgives us. And working together in that communal fellowship and partnership as the Church to build up each other in the faith and share that faith through selfless loving actions with the world.

Subject Sentence: Eyewitness testimony that unites us in Fellowship.

Introduction

We all like to share stories. We like to share stories of humorous events, things that have happened to us, that maybe we couldn't laugh about at the time, but can laugh about now. Stories about us locking our keys in the car when we are out shopping, leaving our wallet or purse in the shopping cart at the store, then driving back and finding it's still there.

As Christians we like to share "God stories". Stories about how we could see the hand of God at work in our life in a miraculous way. Sometimes those stories are so special that we hesitate to share them with everyone. That's because we all have the tendency to try to top the story someone else tells with our own experience, or the experience of someone we know whose story is as great or greater. There is a God story that I don't often share with everybody that involved my oldest daughter, Samantha. It was February 9th, 2007, and the small engine plane she was riding in lost power and crashed in the woods surrounding Pelston Michigan. All three passengers aboard the plane survived, including my daughter, although with serious injuries. I know that it was the hand of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that protected her and all aboard from dying in the crash. It was his healing hand that restored her to health and a normal life. And in doing so He has given her a great witness of faith for herself and to share with others. It's a powerful story and it's still precious to me. Rather than have others try to top it with their own stories and thereby lessen it, rightly or wrongly, I often keep it to myself.

The Amazing Witness of the Apostles

But there is definitely one story that tops all the other God stories we could ever share. And thankfully the Apostle John tells us all about it as an eyewitness to what otherwise would be an unbelievable story. He tells us this story because it's not just his story, but by the power of the Holy Spirit it becomes your story and mine.

He tells us that it was Easter Sunday in the evening. Except he and the other 9 disciples didn't realize it was Easter Sunday. They are huddled together in a locked room because they are afraid. They are afraid that what happened to their Master Jesus might happen to them. That these same Jewish Leaders might come after them next. And they have heard an incredible, unbelievable story from three women in their group that Jesus is alive, risen from the dead. This can't be true. But what if it is? How would He be feeling about them, His followers who betrayed Him and ran off into the night when He was arrested after promising to stand by Him. If this was true, that He rose again, maybe He would be coming after them less than pleased with them. Maybe He was coming to seek vengeance!

And then, all of a sudden, He is there among them! Even though the doors remained locked He just appeared in the middle of them. And instead of saying angry condemning words, instead of using His supernatural powers to get even with them, He says the most wonderful words they could hear, "**Peace be with you.**"

Now what does Jesus mean by this? This is not just some Biblical kind of way to say, “Hey, how are ya!” Or even, “I’m back!” This is Jesus giving to them what He earned for them in His life, death, and resurrection: peace with Him, with God the Father, and peace with one another. The peace that is declared by God through Jesus, our Legal Advocate before the Father. The warfare God had rightly and justly declared against sinners who disobey Him has ended. Jesus has put an end to it as the Atoning Sacrifice for the sins of all humanity. He earned it for them. And He has come not to punish them, but to give them this wonderful gift of grace and love.

This gift is so good and so important He says it again, “**Peace be with you**”. He breathes on them and gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit. And through the power of the Spirit, they can have and hold this peace as their very own. They are at peace with their Lord Jesus Christ, and through Him with the Father, and through the Spirit with one another. And by the Spirit’s power they are told to share this amazing lifechanging story with the world.

Why Share this Amazing Story

A very precious story indeed. The risen Lord coming to them, showing them His hands and side so that they become eyewitnesses to His bodily resurrection. And Jesus even comes again so that Thomas, who was absent the first time, can be an eyewitness to His bodily resurrection, one that can testify that he not only saw Him, but could verify He was raised bodily by actually touching Him and His wounds.

All Eleven of them were verified eyewitnesses to Jesus bodily resurrection in what they saw, heard, gazed upon, touched and felt. And as eyewitnesses Jesus is giving them an important job to go out and do, to spread the Gospel of forgiveness to others. **John 20:23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.**” And John goes about testifying to this witness for this very purpose in his first Epistle, to be the Holy Spirit’s means to share this forgiveness with the whole world.

He is the eyewitness to the Risen Savior, and the Holy Spirit’s witness as to what that means to all people; people like you and me. People who struggle with sin every day. People who when confronted with our continued sinful disobedience are sometimes like those disciples in a locked room, afraid that God is out to get us, that He is losing His patience with us. People who on Judgement Day fear they will face the angry vengeful God. People who not only struggle with sin but struggle with confessing it, because they are afraid of a wrathful God. People who have prideful hearts that do not like to have their sinful faults pointed out to them. People like me, and like you.

These disciples had Jesus appear to them in that locked room out of love in order to chase away their fears over a wrathful God. Jesus has come to you and me for the same reason. He came to you in your baptism, and through the water and the Word breathed on you the Holy Spirit. In your baptism the Spirit made Jesus your atoning sacrifice, whose suffering, death, and resurrection means all of your sins have been taken from you and forever dealt with by Him. He has cleansed you from their defilement that would otherwise separate you from God now and forever. He means all this when He says, **“Peace be with you!”**

And what of these sins we keep committing? Times when we don't mean to sin but become overwhelmed by our passions and anger. Times when we know what we are doing is wrong, but we do it anyway. Times when we have committed the sins of omission that we don't even realize we committed, things we should've done but didn't do. John tells us that by the faith given in baptism we have the Resurrected and Ascended Christ Jesus as our Legal Advocate before the Father. As we keep sinning daily, He stands there before the Father and testifies, **“I've taken this one, and this one, and this one, and this one. I've taken them to the cross and atoned for them all.”**

Now you and I are not there before the Father to see this in action. Instead, John gives us the words of Jesus through the Spirit confirming in our hearts and minds this wonderful gift of grace. It's those powerful words Jesus gave the disciples in that locked room when He breathed on them the Holy Spirit. **John 20:23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.** John directs this testimony to us in his Epistle with these often repeated verses at the beginning of every Divine Worship Service. **1 John 1:8-9 ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

What are we confessing when we say these words? We are confessing that anyone who thinks they are not troubled by sin and doesn't need forgiveness is sorely mistaken. And if they continue in this falsehood all the way to the grave the doors of eternal life will be locked forever. But the Holy Spirit given in baptism is present with us to turn our attention to the sin that exists, even those sins we try to ignore. He makes us see it. But then moves us to confess it; to confess that we are sinners more than sand upon the shore. And rather than fear the wrath of God now and forever there is wonderful Gospel news.

When you confess your sins, you are confessing your faith in your Lord and Savior who always keeps His promises to you. You are confessing Him to be your atoning sacrifice. You are confessing Him to be your Advocate before the Father. You are confessing that He has already taken the shame and the punishment of your sins from you. You are confessing that because of all He has done for you, because He is your atoning sacrifice, which He proved was completed and finished through His resurrection, you indeed are forgiven all of your sins and cleansed from everything unrighteous that would serve to keep you apart from God now and forever.

What This Confession Does in Your Life and Mine

What does this testimony do in your life and mine? Through the work of the Spirit it unites us as the Body of Christ! **1 John 1:7 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.** It allows us to walk in the light of faith, not as those who are perfect, but those who are perfectly forgiven. And as one who trusts by faith that Jesus blood was shed to cleanse me, I am united with all of you who live by the same faith.

This is John's goal in sharing His testimony about the crucified and risen Christ, and how His resurrection proves Him to be the atoning sacrifice for all. He says **1 John 1:3-4³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.** It is the basis of the faith you were given in your baptism that welcomes you into the Body of Christ, which is the Church. It is the Gospel testimony we share that unites us in the unique fellowship we have as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are united as forgiven sinners because of the sacrificial love that moved our Savior to be our atoning sacrifice. We are united by that same love the Spirit plants in our hearts to forgive one another.

And because Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice not just for you and me, but for the whole sinful creation, for every man and woman alive on the planet, He sends us out as the Church to give witness to this wonderful Gospel message with all who need to hear it. And who needs to hear it? Certainly, those who don't yet have faith in Jesus. But also, believers need to be lifted up and reminded of Jesus wonderful gift of grace. It is the message that brings others into this fellowship of believers with us and keeps us in that fellowship despite our continued sinning.

Conclusion

Perhaps you have your own special God story. But whatever it is it can't top John's wonderful, amazing testimony. And unlike some of our amazing stories that we sometimes embellish, this one is completely true. It is the testimony that all of Jesus' disciples clung to and proclaimed even though it caused them to be persecuted, even to death. It is the testimony that moves us to confess our sins because through it the Holy Spirit confirms in our hearts that Jesus was our atoning sacrifice. He confirms that Jesus continues to speak for us in the presence of the Father. He confirms that whenever we confess our sins, we can be sure they have already been forgiven by the blood of Jesus. By faith his story becomes our story and unites us in the special fellowship that is the Body of Christ, the Church. It's the testimony we need to share with one another, and with those who don't Jesus as their atoning sacrifice. May this story, John's testimony, rest upon your hearts and minds by faith now and bring you peace until the day of your own resurrection. Amen.