

Sunday's Sermon

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Can I Get A Witness?

1 John 1:1-2:2

May God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy and peace. Amen.

Our Gospel reading today begins with John the Disciple testifying about his experience with Jesus. We would say that he is sharing his faith, but he is doing something more than that.

He is not only sharing what he believes about this “Word of Life,” but he shares what he has physically encountered; what he has seen with his eyes, what he has heard with his ears, and what he has touched with his hands. John shares from first-hand experience; that is his testimony.

John, the son of Zebedee, was one of the inner circle of the Twelve. John is making statements based on his personal knowledge and experience; so the proclaimer and the content of the proclamation are credible.

History tells us that John makes Christ present to a generation of Christians who no longer can see or hear him, except by the eyes and ears of faith.

In the National Baptist Church, in which I grew up, when the preacher wanted the congregation to give credence, to give validity, to give relevance to the interaction of Christ being present in their daily lives, he would ask: “Can I get a witness?” And the people would respond with stories of how God had been present in their lives that week. That’s what I mean by testimony. And that is what John shares.

Because we live in a flesh and blood world, we need a flesh and blood savior, so it does matter what our eyes have seen, and it does matter what our ears have heard, and it does matter what our hands and fingers have touched.

John is giving witness so that his listeners may participate in this transformative fellowship with Jesus and with other believers. Fellowship as

used in this letter has a deeper meaning than just getting together over ham biscuits and ginger ale punch.

This type of fellowship lends itself to words like companionship, partnership and common life which implies an active faith, a vital covenant relationship of like-minded people whose faith grows stronger because of the witness of each other.

And the most important point in John's message, life in the light of God. God is Light, and that Light enlightens and illumines us. And if our testimony is that we have fellowship with God, then we too are Light Bearers.

It is at this point where John challenges our walk to reflect our word. I have a question for you. Have you ever been called a liar? I hope not. Even the sound of the word feels condemnatory.

We might use the word hypocrite to be politically correct. Folk simply make a judgment based on their observation of us and compare it to what we say; seeing if our actions are contradictory to what we say we believe.

And this is what John says. He doesn't sugar coat it. If our life doesn't match our testimony because we are habitually continuing in sin; we are not living in truth, and we are only fooling ourselves.

We are told that God is pure light and if we want to be involved with God, then we better lose our darkness quickly! If we don't and we continue to claim we are part of God's community, we are nothing more than liars.

But wait! Do not despair! There is help with the discrepancies between a life of darkness and a life of light. And that is the Good News! It's the blood of Jesus; its cleansing power is remarkable, stronger than any bleach, even Clorox.

Through the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we provide the "dirty laundry" so to speak; we supply the self-examination, we supply the introspection, we supply the confession, and Jesus takes care of the rest-oration. That's what the pain, agony, and the humiliation of Good Friday was all about. Jesus enables our life to match our witness.

My favorite part of this scripture is John's testimony regarding living life because of the liberation of the Advocate. Verse 21 – Should anyone just happen to sin, we have an advocate with the Father. By the way, not just any advocate, but Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

I want you to imagine a courtroom scene. An advocate is someone who is called in to plead the cause of another before a judge.

God is the Righteous Judge; we are the defendants. We are required to answer the charges against us. But we don't have to defend ourselves. In truth, we can't, we have no ground to stand on.

So, the Judge has provided for us an Advocate, of His own choosing; a person capable to plead our case, a person competent to stand in our place. This person has the credentials of His pierced side, His thorn-scraped brow, and His nail-scarred hands. He is the only one uniquely qualified to free us from the captivity and enslavement of sin.

What Christ did by dying on the cross was to reconcile God and all creation. Not because of our desire to mend the relationship, but because of God's desire. Even now, as believers, our tendency to sin continues to interfere with our fellowship with the Divine and with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

But, we have an Advocate to come alongside to encourage us, to sustain us, and to intercede for us.

John states that he is sharing his testimony, that "our joy" may be complete.

We experience this same joy, by our words and by our actions as we share what God in Christ means to us and how His presence in our lives enables us to pass on His grace and love to others.

Because of John's testimony, we all are encouraged. It brings to mind a very old song I remember the elders singing in the church where I grew up. The words went something like this:

*"Said I wasn't gonna tell nobody,
but I, couldn't keep it to myself,
Oh I, couldn't keep it to myself,
Oh, I couldn't keep it to myself.
Said I wasn't gonna tell nobody,
but I, couldn't keep it to myself,
What the Lord has done for me."*

I'm so glad John didn't keep it to himself.

Amen, Amen.