

The Rock: 09-13-2020**Series: By Faith**

First reading: John 17:13-21

Title: Abiding love

Scripture: 1 John 1:1-4

Theme:

John the apostle, at the end of his life, writes to the church at large with the love and care of a father to his children.

Introduction:

It certainly has been a unique year so far. Really at the start of 2020 who would have thought this is how the year would turn out?

I do chalk drawings for Lisa throughout the year, as seasons change. In our mudroom She had me put: "Come on in 2020, we are awesome." There are days when I think I should have locked the door and not let 2020 in.

Then there are those moments when we realize that in all of what has been happening in this world, the loss, the confusion and divisiveness, that God is

moving and that the Church has a wonderful opportunity.

If we focus on the right things. Not pretending that everything is just peachy, but rather recognizing that in all of this, God is sovereign and takes care of all things.

Sometimes you have to see things to believe them, and sometimes you have to believe them in order to see.

What that has to do with anything? I don't really know. Just wanted to share that with you.

The Story:

As we begin our journey with the last living Apostle, I think that it is good for us to know that as he wrote his gospel, and these three letters, he was addressing what I would call the "first generation" of the church that were not eye-witnesses of Jesus.

They believe in Jesus of Nazareth by faith, because of the evidence, and the preaching of people like, Peter, Paul, Timothy, John and others.

Those who took the message to the uttermost parts of the world. It is part of the reason we find John saying in

these first four verses, three different times that "our eyes have seen".

They didn't make this up and this was not some new inside spiritual teaching that only a select few could attain. More on that in a bit, but the assurance of what he is teaching them is: This is not a made-up story.

But that John himself is an eye witness. This, to me, assures the reader, both then and now, that the story is true, even if it is hard to believe.

Now, John doesn't identify himself as he begins to write, which seems to be a pattern for him. But he begins in a very familiar way.

"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—"

-1 John 1:1 ESV

As he did at the beginning of his gospel, placing Jesus as being from the beginning, the active creator God, in human form. God the Son:

"...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—”

-1 John 1:2 ESV

This incarnation, that He who always existed has stepped into our time and space as a man. The gospel in its purest form. We saw with our own eyes and testify that it is true.

What is true? Jesus of Nazareth was more than just a carpenter. He was God in the flesh -the promised Messiah. We saw Him. We touched Him. He lived and walked among us.

One of the reasons John is writing this letter, and there are many, but one of them is found in verse 4:

“And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

-1 John 1:4 ESV

That our joy may be complete. The joy of knowing Jesus as savior and king. To know that God created us, loves us and became one of us, and that you also believe.

We've been learning this year about all the people of faith. Heroes of old who believed in God's promises. People like Joseph, Abel, Abraham and Sarah, Moses.

All just regular people whom God used, often in spite of themselves, to bring His salvation plan forward to the world.

I think about this often in the ebbs and flows of life. Especially in the Church, when there are times when I worry more about unity as infighting among followers of Jesus persists.

I am amazed that He could have chosen to fix the world and humanity any way He wanted to. The plan, it seems clear, and a little bit crazy, is to use us -His image-bearers.

The very people who are the problem, He calls to bring about and proclaim the solution. That Jesus came and died for us, and in Him we can have life.

How much love and patience He has with us? Even though we can at times, have very little patience with each other as we muddle along in life.

Grace and mercy are poured out on us every day, but NOT without reason. His love for us should drive us to obedience and service and bring us joy in doing so.

Loving because He first loved us. This church John is writing to existed because the Apostles served at the cost of their lives to make sure people heard about Jesus.

John is talking to a church already suffering from bad teaching and false gospels. It's not even 100AD yet and Gnosticism has crept into the church and has begun to erode the faith and true devotion to Jesus -the risen King.

Add to that, the thought once again, that this generation of believers were very likely the first full generation who were not eye witnesses.

With the exception of John, everyone reading the letter were believing just as we do - BY FAITH.

Which is why John says three times in the first four verses that "We have seen". Evidence based faith -settled in reason. Yet, still believing by faith.

It is important in our day of extreme doubt and uncertainty that we understand this Jesus is not just another "faith story". But rather HE was and is who the Bible says: God/Man.

This eye-witness emphasis is so important. Not to belabor the point, but again in our age where the only thing we can be sure of is being unsure, the Bible makes very clear that those who preached the Gospel at the first, were those who saw Jesus and believed. John, in his gospel:

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

-John 1:14 ESV

Luke, in his history of the early Church records how they picked a replacement for Judas:

"So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."

-Acts 1:21-22 ESV

Peter, that disciple who couldn't get out of his own way, denying he even knew Jesus, writes this in his second letter:

"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

-2 Peter 1:16 ESV

My favorite story, I read every Christmas, is "A Christmas Carol", by Charles Dickens. And the narrator makes this observation right at the beginning:

"The mention of Marley's funeral brings us back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate."

-A Christmas Carol: Charles Dickens Pg. 2

I get the sense sometimes that this is just what John is saying and doing here. That Jesus was dead but more importantly, that He is ALIVE. That has to be believed, or nothing good will come of what I am going to tell you.

I have this unbelievable story to tell you. It's so strange and out there, that you have to see it to believe it. We did. This Jesus of Nazareth is all He claimed to be -and HE was dead- of that you can be sure.

But HE is alive and in order to "see that", you have to believe.

You see, He wasn't a divine being who became human in order to impart knowledge to humans -avoiding any conversation about sin, repentance, and a need to seek God.

Or worse, that he was just another human being who had attained enlightenment through a good life and secret knowledge he passed onto His disciples.

Again, avoiding the Biblical reason and understanding of who this Jesus really is.

Both of these are gnostic concepts -that divine knowledge saves and enlightens, if we really need saving anyway. Or that through this divine knowledge we become little gods ourselves.

Somehow thinking ourselves into a better person and existence. Somewhat of an oversimplification of gnostic concepts, but sufficient for us. Sounds quite post-modern doesn't it?

No. Left to ourselves, we tend never to think ourselves into a better person. John, in answer to this false teaching is making it clear that Jesus is neither of those things.

But rather saying, He is God the Son - fully divine and at the same time fully human. You see, what John is doing here, and what the Bible does for us -AND we need to understand is:

That Jesus of Nazareth made some unique and crazy claims. If they aren't true then that ends the story, that's it.

He claimed to be God, not just a servant of, but God himself:

"So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

-John 19:24-30 ESV

In that meeting with Nicodemus He tells him:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

-John 3:16-17 ESV

This is important for us all. Especially for those of us who believe today. Why? Because of the culture and world in which

we live, believes in everything and nothing.

To be effective gospel tellers we need to know what and why we believe such a crazy story. Because if we are honest, it is. Looking from the outside, it is very easy to understand why it is unbelievable.

But Jesus wasn't pushing an unprovable idea, some kind of secret knowledge that only a select few could ever get. No, he did everything very publicly and openly.

He actually made it possible to disprove His claims. How? He said that he would literally rise from the dead. Not just spiritually, but physically.

To disprove his claims all you had to do was come up with a body, and game over. But they didn't.

Jesus was, in the words of C.S. Lewis: "Either a lunatic, a liar, or LORD -just as He claimed to be."

We have to sort that out as the Holy Spirit tugs on your heart. It's kind of like that feeling you get when you fall in love.

Each time you see that person, at least for me anyway, I just knew inside that she was the one. There was that tug, that feeling I couldn't explain, I just knew.

That's what it's like when the Holy Spirit is working on your heart and mind. Jesus's claims are out there -crazy even. Let's just admit that as a believer.

Maybe he was just a human being (a really good one) who taught us how to be really good people. You know, love everyone, don't hurt each other, treat each other just like you want to be treated.

While that's all true, His claims make Him more than that. He called people to Himself as the answer to life's problems and to the human condition.

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

-Matthew 11:28-30 ESV

For those who believe, and whom the Father has called will find rest in Him. No one else made such a claim, as He circled worship around Himself and not the Temple.

On His last night with His friends he tells Thomas and then Phillip:

"...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except

through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

-John 14:6-8 ESV

As early as John's day, these claims were being challenged and changed. Changed into some kind of mystical journey to be taken all alone on some road to enlightenment.

Jesus made it very clear -I AM the way, the truth and the life. No one made such audacious claims. Humanity has to do something with Him and what He said. Humanity has to decide what to do with this Jesus.

All of these claims are unique to HIM. Why? Because as much as we can point to others who have said the same things, we look at them and say: Crazy! Why? Because they all died and we have the bodies to prove it. Lost to history, never to be heard again.

Application:

John is saying right at the outset of this letter of abiding love: We have seen, heard, touched - the very word of life. Jesus Christ of Nazareth- Born of a virgin, testified to in the Scriptures that He was the one, showed it in his life and ministry, was crucified, DIED and rose on the third day. Ascended into heaven and is alive and interceding for us every moment of every day.

That is the GOSPEL -lunacy in the eyes of the world. Dead people, stay dead. True enough -but not this guy. We saw the dead guy, and then we saw Him alive after he was dead.

Not a spiritual thing, our minds weren't playing tricks.

You can trust me that what I am about to share with you is the truth! Why? Because we saw, and we want you to be a part of that, to be a follower of Jesus in a world of confusion and lies.

We hold out this truth:

"...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."

-1 John 1:3 ESV

John is simply following the instructions given to him by the risen Jesus:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

-Matthew 28:18b-20 ESV

Compelled to preach of the abiding love of the one who paid it all -that we might live for Him who created us and calls us His own.

The joy made complete starts with the sharing of this beautiful story -That God has reconciled the world to Himself, in Jesus, because He loves us..