

Sunday, April 11, 2021
The Second Sunday of Easter

“Testimonials”

Well, it's the Easter season and I saw that a mega church down in the Southern California area actually advertised Easter by saying; Easter-April 1st through 4th. If only it were so easy. I understand what the church was doing. They were taking Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday and pulling it all together and saying this is the whole Easter message here. Jesus with His disciples instituting the Lord supper, Jesus being betrayed and arrested and going to the cross, dying for our sins, Jesus in the tomb all day Saturday, Jesus risen from the dead, on Easter Sunday. But the reality is this, the Easter season going way, way back has been one of fifty days. It's been a time of sending, a time of testimony, a time of looking at the impact that Jesus's resurrection had on those who were immediately close to Him.

And so, as we go to John chapter 20, we see Jesus coming to His disciples. John tells us that the disciples were behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. It is a realistic fear, they had crucified Jesus but when Jesus showed up with the doors locked, the first thing He says is 'peace be with you,' and then He shows them His hands and shows them His side where He had been pierced by the nails and by the spear. He was probably wearing sandals so seeing His feet was no major problem. After showing them those marks, He again says, 'peace be with you.'

Then He continues, '...as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' You see, Jesus had already told the disciples that He would rise from the dead, that He would go before them to Galilee, where He would meet them, and the disciples had kind of missed out on all of that. The crucifixion really rocked their faith, rocked their boat and they were frozen in fear and they were stuck in place. Jesus comes to them, shows them He's risen, gives them peace, and then He gives them the answer to being frozen, stuck in fear. He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

This will take us back to our confirmation classes or instruction that we had as we became members of this church, or maybe of another church. The role of the Holy Spirit? Well according to Jesus, Himself, in speaking to His disciples, it is the Holy Spirit who works faith in our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit who brings to our remembrance all that Jesus has said, and what we've been taught. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the very words to speak. When Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on them and says receive the Holy Spirit, He's beginning a life changing, a spiritual transformation of these disciples.

When we go to the book of Luke, we see that He adds to that. We see that He says, 'these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' It was our theme for the entire Lent Season; how Christ fulfilled the Prophets, the Law, the Psalms. But then Luke continues and says then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And we see a couple key components right away that Jesus wanted those disciples, and I believe us, to focus on. Number one, that the Prophet said the Christ should suffer. The Christ, the Messiah, He should suffer for our sin, and suffer in our place. Number two, He would rise, and did rise on the third day. Number three, that we repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations. Notice it is not just forgiveness, it's repentance. It's an acknowledgement of sin and that we need a Savior; and that Savior then brings forgiveness. The last thing is, 'you are witnesses of these things.' Interesting, interesting choice of words. Witnesses are called to court to give testimony and we see that John understood that this is exactly what Jesus was saying. After recounting the second meeting with Jesus when doubting Thomas was there; he then records the beginning of his testimony, or I should say an explanation of his testimony.

He wrote, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in His name." And so here towards the end of the gospel we get an explanation of John's focus for the entire gospel. John's gospel is very unique because it's not like the first three gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, which we call the synoptic gospels because they give a synopsis of everything that Jesus did. But John is different, John focuses in with laser like precision on the teachings of Jesus. He really focuses in on the divinity claims of Jesus

when Jesus used that personal name of God, 'I AM,' when claiming to be, 'I am the Good Shepherd, I am the truth, I am the gate, I am the resurrection and the life.' And John focuses on the fulfillment of those claims. It is written like an affidavit, something that would be presented in the courts.

It should be noted that John's gospel was also the last of the gospels written. While again the others focused on the miracles, Matthew, focuses on the fulfillment of prophecy. This is what John is speaking of when he says there are other things not written in this book. What is he saying when he says that? They are written in other books. In essence, John is saying, if you want to hear the rest, read the other books because they were already written and known. John wrote his as a personal testimony, focusing on the teachings of Jesus, His fulfillment of the prophetic claims and His own claims; because already lies were working their way into the church in the form of what this called and is called to today Gnosticism. It's a belief that there is secret knowledge that you must know above and beyond what the Bible reveals to us. John was confronting this Gnosticism head on.

And we see John being the one who is really focused on doctrine and the foundation of that doctrine in his gospel, and in his three shorter books: First, Second and Third John. You see after the resurrection, John lived quite a life. It started in Jerusalem, where he was one of the apostles; he was one of the leaders of the early Christian Church. But there was a dispersion, the Jews went after them the religious leaders, and so those apostles moved out throughout the world. John was arrested for his faith in Jesus. He was put in a jail on the prison island of Patmos. It was the first centuries version of Alcatraz. It was there that he had the vision that we know of as the Book of Revelation.

But John was eventually released. He went to Ephesus, where he was an elder in the church. The elders were supposed to teach. And so it would appear that First, Second, and Third John are not letters like Paul wrote to the Philippians, or to the people of Galatia, or where the author of the Hebrews wrote to the Hebrew people, or Peter writing to the church as a whole. It appears that these are that John wrote.

When we look at the first one when you get your focused on “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands considering the word of life.” Remember Jesus said, I am the way the truth and the life. This is a reference to Jesus. How do we know that for absolute sure? By the very next words, ‘concerning the word of life.’ The Life, Jesus, was made manifest or apparent and we have seen it. Who's we? The apostles. We are eyewitnesses, John is saying. And we're not just eyewitnesses, and testify to it, and proclaim it to you. Remember what Jesus said, ‘just as the Father sent me, so I am sending you.’ Sending you to do what? To testify.

What is it that John testifies to right away in this first sermon that's recorded? Number one, that God is light. He is the one that lights the way to heaven for us. Number two, if you don't walk in the light; if you don't follow that light, that Jesus is the way, you have no fellowship with Him. In fact, you will most likely say that you have no sin; and because of this, there is no truth in it, and you deceive yourself.

But what if you see Jesus is alive? Well then you walk in the light, you follow in His footsteps and in His teachings and then you have fellowship with Him and then you have the truth. You are not deceived because you have the truth, Jesus Christ. Part of that truth is that wonderful message that comes because of Easter. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

What the world needs today, is a few more apostles or disciples. Those who like John have seen, have heard, have experienced the life changing effect that comes through the gospel of Jesus and comes through the power of the Holy Spirit. But disciples, apostles, people called by Jesus, who He sends just as he had been sent; but are sent to bear testimony. This is the truth! And like John, may that testimony truly be ours. Where we can say as John says, Jesus is the life, He is the way, He is the path of Salvation and He is my risen Lord and Savior. That is what we are witnesses to. Let us go and be witnesses and give our testimony, maybe not in a court, and maybe someday in a court, but out there in all the world.

In our Saviors Name, Amen.