

3rd Sunday of Easter
April 14, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
1 John 1:5-2:2

1 John 1:5-2:2 (EHV)

This is the message we heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him but still walk in darkness, we are lying and do not put the truth into practice. ⁷But if we walk in the light, just as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his Word is not in us.

²My children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin. If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.

Dear Friends in Christ,

True Christianity is more honest about the human condition than any other religion or philosophy in the world. John's First Epistle before us this morning makes this clear. John, as he does in his Gospel, uses the contrast of light and darkness to make his point. Christians are to live in the light and not in the darkness. Of course, this contrast of light and darkness applies to righteousness and sin. But it also tells us that Christians are to be completely honest about our condition. We are not to hide in the darkness or in the shadows to conceal our true selves. We are to live in the light of truth, exposing sin and our sinful self to God's truth. John also encourages us to live in the light of God's truth that we have an Advocate in Jesus Christ. The truth is that we who are believers in Christ are both sinner and saint at the very same time. We must be honest about this dual truth all of our lives.

The Danger of Living in the Darkness

John gives us examples of living in the darkness:

⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his Word is not in us.

We often use some of this as part of our public confession of sins in the worship service. So, maybe these words of warning from John don't apply much to us. We confess our sins, at least once a week. But when the time for silent confession arrives, do we have a list of sins to confess? Or might we use that time to think about the people who have sinned against us and wonder if they are confessing those sins? Or might we begin to wonder what we are having for lunch or when afternoon activity is supposed to start or what the weather is going to be like on Monday?

Oh, the sinful nature is fighting us even when we are actively confessing our sins. We are doing what good Christians are supposed to do. Confess to the Lord. But even in this, the sinful nature wants us to hide the whole truth from ourselves, from others and even from God. We confess the general sins, but not the specific ones. We might at times be looking the part of a penitent Christian but in our hearts, we don't really think we did much that needs forgiveness in the past week. John tells us we are deceiving ourselves.

The sinful nature we all still have is great at living in the shadows and making itself seem less dangerous, less sinful, less evil than it truly is. And we can be deceived by our own sinful nature. In the world, the wickedness of the sinful nature can be clearly seen. Murder, abuse, human trafficking, and other terrible evil happens in this world. This is the sinful nature living in the

open. But our sinful nature attempts to deceive us and tell us that we are different. Our sinful nature is not so evil. Our sinful nature is better than that of the truly wicked. After all, I would never commit murder. I would never commit adultery. I would never...fill in the blank with whatever sin you consider the most wicked. When we think this way, we are deceiving ourselves and we are calling God a liar. God tells us clearly about the wickedness that comes from the sinful nature in every human since Adam and Eve. You and I are not the exceptions. There is only one exception – Jesus Christ himself. The rest of us are to be completely honest with ourselves. We all have the capacity for great evil because the sinful nature in us is evil. It has no good within it.

In addition, we are to be completely honest about the sins that show up in our lives. Many in society think Christianity is a way to get people to be good in society. Sometimes we fall into that and therefore do not want to admit that we have sinned and do sin. We deceive ourselves as we try to keep our sins in the darkness so no one else sees. After all, we are Christians and Christians can't let others see our sins. But people do. You may try to hide sins from your spouse but he or she knows. You can try to hide your sins from your children, but children figure it out. You might hide your sins from parents, but they know. Friends know. Coworkers know. You know. And God knows.

One of the presenters at our pastors' conference last week gave an interesting way to shed some light on the sinful nature and its results in you. Think of what you are like when you are behind the wheel of a car. Suddenly, we are the center of the universe. Everyone else is dumb. No one else knows how to drive. Kindness, compassion, forgiveness, putting the best construction on things – these don't tend to be the attitudes and actions for many when we are behind the wheel of a vehicle. When we recognize our sins, John encourages us to bring them into the light.

This means that we do not hide the fact that we have sinned and do sin from the people in our lives. People already know that we are not perfect. Our attitude should be completely honest in this too. On the other hand, this does not mean you need to confess every detail of every sin to everyone you meet. Use some discretion. But there are times to find a trusted friend, a family member, a pastor to confess a specific sin. Living in the light of God's truth means being honest about sin with ourselves, before others and before God.

The Freedom of Living in the Light

In addition to trusting what God says about sin, living in the light of God's truth means trusting what God says about Jesus and what he has made us. Listen again to selected verses:

This is the message we heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light. In him there is no darkness at all... ⁷if we walk in the light, just as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin... ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness...

²My children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin. If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.

Cleanses us from ALL sin. Cleanses us from ALL unrighteousness. The atoning sacrifice for the sins of the WHOLE world. We are sinners who have no sin before the perfect Son of God. We are sinners who have no guilt before the Righteous One. Just as it is difficult to grasp the depravity of our own sinful nature, so also it is difficult to understand the total and complete forgiveness accomplished for us by Christ. ALL our sins! All our unrighteousness!

Because of Jesus, not one sin is counted against us. Not the secret ones, not the sins of our heart or mind or flesh. Not one sin is left unforgiven. Of this we can be confident. For the price paid to

cleanse us is the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the Righteous One, the innocent Lamb of God who was sacrificed in our place. As the Son of God, his perfect blood is valuable enough to pay for the sin of the whole world. He is the atoning sacrifice for your sins, every single one. He is the atoning sacrifice for everyone's sin, every single person.

Live in this truth of God. Sunbathe in this light from the Lord. You are forgiven. John encourages us "*I write these things to you so that you will not sin.*" The light of Christ's forgiveness makes us want to live without sin. In fact, it empowers us to live without sin. We can say no to our wicked, evil sinful nature. We can resist the depravity of the world. We can tell the devil to go away. We can even work on being patient with other drivers when we are behind the wheel. This is walking in the light of forgiveness, in the way of the Lord.

But then we fall back into darkness. We sin. We slip up. We fail. And the devil is right there to tell us that we don't deserve to be in the light of Christ. You don't deserve to be forgiven. You had your chance to live in the light of God's Word and you can't even make it one day. What kind of Christian are you anyway? Maybe you're not. When the father of lies is telling you such things, listen to the truth from the inspired author, John: "*My children,*"

Those two words bring such comfort, joy and assurance to us. "My children." God has not forsaken us because of our sin. He still calls us his children. He stills loves us as his children. Yes, he wants us to resist sin and walk in his ways. But we who are at the same time saints and sinners are always God's beloved children. Listen again to what Jesus does for the children of God:

If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.

Jesus died to be the atoning sacrifice for you and the whole world. This same Jesus rose from the dead and lives forever at the right hand of the Father in heaven. The ever-living Jesus Christ is your Advocate. He will never stop advocating for you, for your forgiveness, for your eternal future. By nature, we are sinners without any hope of eternal life. Through faith in Christ, we have been made forgiven children of God, with the certain hope of eternal life. Such is the Christian life, lived in the light of God's truth. This is a message we continue to proclaim to ourselves so that we are not deceived by any other messages in this world or in our heads. It is the message everyone in the world needs.

Amen.