

“Not Fake News!”
Sermon for Sunday, April 8, 2018

Our lesson comes this morning from a little letter in the New Testament known as 1 John, which was likely written some sixty to seventy years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. By this time, followers of Jesus have been pretty much disowned by the Jewish community and these “Christians” are seen as a new religious community. In addition, the Christian faith has spread throughout Asia Minor and beyond to people who have never been Jews to begin with—they are Gentiles. And so, as the Christian church grew and expanded into different contexts in the late first century, there were disagreements between Christian believers about who Jesus was and the significance of his ministry, his life and his death—and what it all meant for the lives of his followers. The writer of 1 John is offering what we could call an “apologetic”, meaning he is defending what he believes to be the bedrock truths about Jesus Christ.

We might say he is writing to counter “fake news” about the faith!

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 1:1-2:2

“The Word of God for the people of God... Thanks be to God!”

What do you believe about Jesus Christ?

What do you really believe?

Do you believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the incarnational (“in-the-flesh”) presence of God?

Do you believe he was raised from the dead?

Do you believe he performed miracles? Do you believe he still does?

Do you think it is “fake news” OR Good News?

What have you heard? What have you seen? What have you touched?

What do you really believe? Could you share what you believe with another?

The writer of 1 John knew exactly what he believed and there is an unbridled joy and passion in the words of this letter. Did you hear it?

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. (1 John 1:1-2)

Believe what I am telling you... because I have seen it, I have heard it and I have touched it!

And what did he believe was the truth?

- Truth #1: Jesus was the incarnational (in the flesh) presence of God. He was not just a good man or just a prophet or just a wonderful teacher... he was the very presence of God. Some scholars believe that the writer of John's Gospel and this letter known as 1 John were one in the same... we hear similar language. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* Jesus Christ was the presence of God on earth... God on the cross... God who left an empty tomb... God with us.
- Truth #2: "If we say that we do not sin, we're only fooling ourselves." In a survey of Christians across several denominations in a Midwestern state: Fully 1/3 admitted that they 'make many mistakes but are not sinful themselves. Here's the thing: If we believe that we are not sinners, then we have no need of a Savior! Most of us are pretty good at excusing our own sins and calling them "mistakes". Or we find ways to justify what we do. But the truth is that every one of us is a sinner. Every one of us needs a Savior—Jesus—to bring us back into relationship with God.
- Truth #3: "If we admit our sins—make a clean breast of them—he won't let us down... he'll forgive our sins...When Jesus Christ, righteous Jesus served as a sacrifice for our sins, he solved the sin problem for good." (from "The Message")
When Jesus offered himself to be crucified, he took our sin upon himself and he became the Lamb of God—the sacrifice for your sins and mine—he paid the price for the redemption of the world. Jesus did what we cannot do for ourselves—make us clean, make us righteous before God. That's not fake news... that's the Good News!

I think about what I have heard. I have heard God's voice in prayer and scripture. Especially the words of Paul: *"For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the Twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. The he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all... he appeared also to me."* (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

I think about what I have seen. I remember going on a mission trip to Henderson Settlement in southeastern Kentucky. One morning, as we celebrated worship, I look out across the Appalachian Mountains... God's beautiful creation took my breath away. I have seen the change that faith in Jesus Christ can bring to someone's life... especially my own.

I think about how I have been touched. My heart was 'strangely warmed' as a 6-year-old girl from Vacation Bible School, who learned that the Lord is my Shepherd—I shall not want! And it has been "warmed" time and again as I have journeyed through life. Faith really is more about "heart" knowledge than "head" knowledge!

This is not fake news... this is the Good News:

- That Jesus Christ existed from the beginning;
- That he healed the sick and raised the dead;
- That he died on the cross as the atonement for our sins;
- That he was raised on the third day;
- That the resurrected Christ is seen by many;
- That Jesus is at work in your life.

Let us pray...