

A Sunday Devotional for God's People in Church and At Home
The First Church of Evans
Founder's Sunday - July 5, 2020
10am Service

Greetings from Jerusalem Corners,

Today, Founder's Sunday, we will welcome back to our sanctuaries those brothers and sisters whose health and circumstances allow them to attend public, common worship at this time. We are well aware that many of you will not be able to attend Sunday services, and we will continue to provide you the means to join us at worship from home. More importantly, we will bear you in our hearts and keep you in our prayers, knowing that you are with us and waiting for the day when we can see your faces here as well.

Call to Worship

John 3:16,17

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten 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.*

Hymn

"They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love"

Choir Members

An Opening Prayer

Our Father and God,

We are so grateful that you have preserved us together as your children through these months when we could not gather to worship you. Please forgive us our sins and fill us with your Spirit now to thank you and praise you for the love that sent your Son to save us. And put it in our hearts to love you back and serve you well; through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Devotional

John 3:18-21

Pastor Stephen Ridge

*Whoever believes in Christ is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already,
because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
And this is the judgment: The light has come into the world,
and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.
For everyone who does wicked things hates the light
and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.
But he who does what is true comes to the light,
so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.*

This morning, we return to where we were in John's gospel back in March when the pandemic fell, the tail end of a conversation between Jesus, the village carpenter, and old man Nicodemus, the big city rabbi, who was more religious than any of us will ever be, but he showed up on Jesus' doorstep late at night because he knew Jesus had something more than he would ever learn from his scrolls or from any of his rabbi friends. And Jesus had blown the old man's mind, talking about being "*born from above...born in the Spirit,*" challenging Nicodemus to start life over, washing in the waters of baptism, sailing on a heavenly wind, that could land him who knows where, doing God knows what. It was not the sort of thing we old men typically want to get involved in!

But when God loves us, he challenges us! And we read in John's gospel that God loves us: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*"

Of course, Nicodemus is thinking about perishing because Jesus has just told him a story about snakebite. Old Israel in Moses' day had stumbled into a snake-pit in the wilderness, and Moses had nailed a bronze snake to a crossbeam, so that anyone who looked at the crossbeam would be healed from the snakebite.

"That's how God loved the world!", John's gospel teaches us. The point being that we are all snake-bit. We're all guilty of sins that course through our lives the way venom courses through a person's body if he or she gets bitten in the desert. We are guilty, we should perish, but God loved us and sent his Son to be nailed to a crossbeam, so that we could live in God's company with God's help here and now. But more than that, if we'll just look to the cross, just trust what Jesus did for us there, we can live forever, be forgiven and loved by God forever, if we'll just look to and trust in his Son here and now.

So the question becomes: Why wouldn't anyone do that? Who wouldn't want to be loved by God and saved by Christ? And the answer John's gospel provides is that trusting Christ, looking to the cross requires us to face "*the light,*" to deal with the holiness that lives in Christ's heart and is taught in his gospel. And none of us will want that or do that, till God's Spirit convinces us that God's love and forgiveness is real, and that the holiness Jesus calls us to live will actually fill our souls and make our lives better. God loves us, so he calls us into a sort of light that is hard to take, painful at first glance, but strangely, against all expectation, holiness actually leads us to joy. Go figure.

Offering *Acts 20:35* "...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

The offering plate is placed on the way out of the sanctuary, or you can mail your offering from home to:

The First Church of Evans, Attn: Cindy Fanara, P.O. Box 364, Derby, NY, 14047.

Hymn

"America The Beautiful"

Choir Members

The Holy Communion

Prayer after Communion

Please keep the governing authorities in prayer that they make wise decisions in response to the pandemic and to the recent racial conflict and civil unrest. Please keep our medical people and other first line public servants and their families in prayer as they selflessly face danger to save the lives of sick and vulnerable people. Please remember our elderly loved ones who are at home or in care facilities. Please especially remember those people and families who have lost loved ones during the pandemic, most recently the Furey-Vernon family. Please also pray for Jean Hill who is in the hospital recovering from a treatment and Richard Pearson who is still in the hospital and Jerry Galfo as he completes his recovery at home from surgery.

An Ancient Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26

*"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious unto you; the LORD lift his countenance upon you and give you his peace."*

(The video worship service we offered for Founder's Sunday is posted on our church website TheFirstChurchofEvans.com)

Founder's Sunday - July 5, 2020

Video Service

Call to Worship

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Devotional

1 John 1:5-9

Elder and Properties Chair, Carl Mende

*This is the message that we have heard from him and announce to you,
that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.
If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.
If we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Our Scripture Lesson today finds the Apostle John an old man, writing to a new generation of disciples who were beginning to lose their way. And so John opens his letter by reminding his young readers that, when he was young, he had "*looked upon...touched...and heard...*" the Lord Jesus in the flesh. It amounted to a claim of authority. What John writes in this letter are not his own personal opinions or ideas about God, this is Christ's own message about the Father and Himself. So John begins by saying, "*This is the message we have heard from him, and announce to you,*" and he continues his letter by summing up what Jesus taught him, "*that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.*"

So the essential nature of what God is; is light. To say that God is light is to emphasize the purity, the glory, and the truthfulness of God. We could say that light is truth and darkness is ignorance or error; light is purity and darkness is evil. John goes on to write: "*If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.*" The interesting thing to note about darkness is that it only exists in the absence of light, therefore darkness cannot have fellowship with God, for "*God is light.*" If we walk in the darkness, we are deceiving ourselves about our relationship with God. John writes that we must "*walk in the light, as he is in the light.*" When we walk in the light, we talk to God in prayer, we listen to him in his Word, and we imitate his character.

The Apostle then continues on to describe two characteristics of "*walking in the light.*" The first is that Christians who walk in the light enjoy "*fellowship with one another.*" The point being that if we do not have fellowship with one another, then one individual or both individuals are not walking in the light. Two Christians who are in right relationship with God will also find a way to be in right relationship with each other. Because if we are "*walking in the light,*" we will display the same kind of forgiveness and patience with other Christians that we hope to receive from God when we sin and disappoint him.

The second characteristic of "walking in the light" is that *"the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."* The verb translated "cleanses" is in the present tense, which tells us that this is a continuous process. We need that continual cleansing by *"the blood of Jesus."* Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all our sins, past, present, and future. We need to come to God continuously with the simple request, "Cleanse me, forgive me by *"the blood of Jesus."*

The promise we can take away from John's letter is that, if we want to walk in the light, if we want to have fellowship with God and with each other, Jesus has made it possible. In John's gospel, chapter 8, verse 12, Jesus says, *"Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Jesus can make this promise to us because his work on the cross deals with the guilt and stain of our sin, which would otherwise hinder us, first, in our relationship with God and, then, with each other. The good news is, as John goes on to write, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* All we have to do is ask: Jesus has paid the price so that we can *"walk in the light as he is in the light."*

Offering *Acts 20:35* "...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

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Hymn

"America The Beautiful"

Choir Members

Prayer *Matthew 7:7* "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you."

Please keep the governing authorities in prayer that they make wise decisions in response to the pandemic and to the recent racial conflict and civil unrest. Please keep our medical people and other first line public servants and their families in prayer as they selflessly face danger to save the lives of sick and vulnerable people. Please remember our elderly loved ones who are at home or in care facilities. Please especially remember those people and families who have lost loved ones during the pandemic, most recently the Furey-Vernon family. Please also pray for Jean Hill who is in the hospital recovering from a treatment and Richard Pearson who is still in the hospital and Jerry Galfo as he completes his recovery at home from surgery.

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