

The Cosmic Reset

Philippians 3:7-14; 1 John 1:5-2:2

I've spoken and taught four times this year on the resurrection of Jesus as seen through the eyes of "*the disciple Jesus loved*", that is the Apostle John. John is an interesting character in the gospel story. Probably the youngest of Jesus' disciples, he lived so long that near the end of his life, there were Christians who wondered if he would ever die. And although he was prominent in the early church, he appears right next to Peter often in the book of Acts, John waits decades, he was an old man, before he writes a word that reaches us about what he heard and saw and learned about Jesus during the three years when he and Jesus were so close.

So we have just started the first of the letters John wrote the early Christians.

And so far he's communicated to us, that even as an old man, he still trembles with excitement when he remembers the sound and sight and feel of Jesus, starting when God the Son stood on a beach in Galilee and called John and his brother James from their fishing boat and changed their lives forever. So John writes to us this morning, "*This is the message we have heard from him and announce to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all!*"

So the first fact John gathered from the sound and sight and feel of Jesus is that God the Son and his Father and God the Spirit are "*light*". God is good and pure and right in a way that no fallen man or woman can even comprehend, never mind begin to match. God is light, and you and I are born and bred to varying degrees and shades of darkness. Our love is complicated and deceptive and unreliable. God's love is simple and pure and can be trusted.

And so the old apostle goes on to warn us that it's possible for us to kid ourselves, he writes: "*If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we deceive ourselves and do not practice the truth.*" So it's possible for us to exercise a degree of religion and piety and not be right with God, possible for us to not share in the fellowship with God that Jesus lived and died and rose from the dead to make possible for us. Why? How can this be?

It happens when we remain in darkness, when we won't take to heart what God says is right and true and honorable and we won't honestly compare our thoughts and words and actions to the way of life the gospel teaches we ought to live. We withdraw into shadows, we hide and stay away from God and church so as not to have to face how different his thoughts and words, his ideals and character are from what works for us as we navigate our way through life.

But it seems reasonable to ask that, if the goodness and purity and selflessness God commands of us is not within our reach, how can God expect us to "*walk in the light*", to live a way of life that is beyond us?

And the answer comes imbedded in the command to do the impossible. John writes: *“If we walk in the light, as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us of all sin.”* So two things happen when we have the faith to reach for the “light” John commands of us here. First, *“we have fellowship with one another”*. God knits us together as those brothers and sisters whose common faith allows us to attempt the impossible together.

None of us could get anywhere near anything like God’s light on our own. But loving and wanting and serving and worshiping God together teaches us a sort of love that makes each of us and all of us more like God the longer we stay at it. And second, John promises us that *“the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”*

It follows that whatever John is telling us to do when he teaches us to *“walk in the light”*, it doesn’t entail never making a mistake or doing anything wrong. Because even if we do walk in the light, the blood of Jesus, his death for our sins, is going to a necessary part of this walk God is commanding of us. To walk in the light with God does not entail our never sinning or failing. Which makes sense when you consider two of the more prominent people in John’s resurrection account.

When Mary Magdalene envelops Jesus in the resurrection garden, there’s no sense that her demoniac past is anywhere in play. Whatever Mary used to be is no barrier at all between her and Jesus at that moment. She embraces him fearlessly and holds on because she knows that God’s resurrected Son loves her and wants her. Likewise, Jesus both confronts Peter about denying him three times and forgives him for it, no scolding, no analyzing the failure. Jesus just points Peter toward the future and commands him to serve, his dramatic failure notwithstanding.

And then there’s Paul, Christ’s sworn enemy who did real harm before the risen Jesus shocked and awed him into changing his ways. But whoever may have held that against Paul, the Apostle himself didn’t waste any time worrying about it. By his own account, he walked in the light without ever pretending to own the light for himself. In our Call to Worship he tells us that he possessed a *“righteousness...which comes from Christ...on the basis of faith.”*

Which permanently pointed his life toward the future Jesus promised him, so he writes to us, *“Brothers and sisters, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* The point being that for all these people and for us, the resurrection of Jesus became a cosmic reset which made walking in light and becoming like God a possibility over and against what we used to be and despite the mistakes we

still make and the sins we still commit. The resurrection is what gets us to the place where
“Perfect love casts out all fear”