

## **The Ancient Church**

The record of the activities of the ancient church in the Book of Acts is quite remarkable. People were really invested – in economic, spiritual, and physical ways – in each other’s lives. You know, we sometimes talk about radical hospitality – and the ancient church, doing what we read earlier this morning, really shows what that looks like in practice. It’s the idea of “What’s mine is yours,” rather than what we so often say in our culture, “What’s yours is mine.”

Along with the passage from Acts, I want to look at one of the Epistles written by John with you this morning. Scholars think that John wrote 1 John while he was in Ephesus. He wrote it to a group of believers who were in the middle of a horrible situation. Some of them had decided to abandon their faith in Jesus Christ as it had been first taught to them, because they found the idea that God had come in a human body impossible to reconcile with the common idea – in those days – that the body is evil, and only the spirit is good.

Despite their denial of Jesus, their immoral lives, and their lack of love in action, they claimed to know God and belong to God. They were adamant that their focus on spiritual things put them above the rest of the group – and they demonstrated this by leaving the fellowship of believers. Those remaining were shaken to the core, uncertain about all the things which they had been previously taught. We may not want to admit this, but some of this sounds familiar to us. As they say, “the more things change, the more they stay the same!”

Anyhow, a person who had been an eyewitness of all that Jesus did wrote to reassure them about what they had heard. The author doesn’t identify himself, but Bible scholars suggest that it was likely the same John who wrote the Gospel account. So, in a nutshell, that’s some of the background for what we’re going to look at this morning. If you have your Bible or Bible app handy, turn with me to 1 John 1:1-2:2.

**Read 1 John 1:1-2:2.**

## **Daylight Savings Time**

Four weeks ago, we moved our clocks forward to “Daylight Savings Time.” It’s a weird idea. The label suggests to some folks that by moving the clock forward, we somehow “save” daylight. Of course, we know that no human being can add even a second more of light to our days. When we move the clock forward, we postpone daylight’s onset and its ending.

This clock movement on our part has some negative effects. Daylight Savings Time leaves some students who are on their way to school – and teachers – in the

dark, rather than the light. It also at least traditionally means that farmers who depend on their crops' dryness must wait an extra hour in the morning to harvest them. And, some people driving little gray Honda Civics in the early morning, on their way to the Anna Honda plant, forget to turn on their car lights until an old red Ford F-150 pulled out in front of them on Lochard Road! Then they flip them on, flash their high beams, and honk their horn.

Friends, earlier this week I pulled out of my driveway in front of a car – and he wasn't happy. It was just before sunrise – he didn't have lights on, and his car perfectly matched the road. I didn't see him. No one was injured, and nothing was damaged. After flashing his lights and high beams, he shut them off, and drove the rest of the way to his jobsite without his lights on. Sometimes we don't learn from our mistakes. As the Church, we need to have our lights on. We need to be focused on the Light – and learn from our mistakes. Here's what I mean.

### **The Light of the World Is Jesus**

First John 1 draws a sharp contrast between light and dark – as well as between God and people. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life,” (1 John 1:1), we're told. The Word of life he's referring to is Jesus Christ – who was, who is, and who will come again. “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us,” (verse 2), this again refers to Jesus Christ, who has always existed in unity with the Father.

The kicker here, that I want to point out is the next few verses: This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out 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, purifies us from all sin,” (verses 5-7).

You know the old hymn, *The Light of the World Is Jesus*. John characterizes God as light. He also characterizes people's natural spiritual state as darkness. In a sense, he invites the ancient group he first wrote the letter to – and us today – to walk out of our natural darkness, and into God's glorious light! He mentions a variety of ways in which we display our preference for spiritual darkness. He tells us that we claim to have fellowship in Him – but walk in darkness, (verse 6, paraphrased). He goes as far as saying that we lie and don't live by the truth.

### **Sometimes We Prefer the Darkness**

In the same vein as me pulling out of the driveway in front of the car earlier this week, is the imagery of stumbling around in the dark. Have you ever had to get up in

the middle of the night to use the bathroom, and forgotten that a laundry basket, a shoe, or some other item was in the path? I'm glad that Alison doesn't play with Legos in the hallway – Kayleigh and Hunter used to do that when they were growing up. Stepping on those in the middle of the night is no fun!

The difference here, is that the apostle uses the metaphor to show a person who has access to the light that is God's good will and purposes but prefers to wander around in the dark. Sometimes we prefer the darkness. Willful disobedience, according to John, contradicts a claim to have fellowship with God. It's that nine letter word that starts with an "h" that church folks really don't like – "hypocrisy!" John goes on to offer an example of such darkness by twice referring to dishonesty about our natural inclination toward disobedience. He writes, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us," (verse 8).

He makes an even bolder statement in verse 10: "If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word is not in us." One of the most striking things about John's assertions about our spiritual darkness is its intimate relationship with untruth. He insists that people who claim some kind of moral perfection don't just lie to themselves. They also turn God into a liar. In such dishonesty, the apostle goes on to tell us that there's no room for either the truth, or God's word.

This is a hard topic for us, as Americans, to talk about – and hard to hear. As the Church, we must be willing to admit, much like the old Anne Wilson song, "the only thing good about me is Jesus." Any kind of close relationship with God includes honesty about our failure to love God and neighbor. People who have fellowship with God are honest with each other, God, and our self – about our disobedience.

### **Jesus Intercedes for Us**

This sheds some light on the statement about God being Light. There's no untruthfulness in Him. He doesn't lie the way we do when we claim to be sinless. Think for a moment about the character of God. He's truthful, good, holy, and righteous.

As a result, God has absolutely nothing to do with what's untruthful, unholy, and unrighteous. He has nothing to do with what's spiritually dark and darkened. But He gladly has everything to do with people whom the Spirit has moved out of our natural darkness and into the light that is a faithful and obedient reception of the amazing grace of God.

There's a beautiful promise we're given in today's epistolary lesson. John writes, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One," (1 John 2:1). And "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness," (1 John 1:9). We can imagine that, when we admit our

love for spiritual darkness, Jesus steps in on our behalf. He intercedes for us before the Father for us.

## **We Walk in the Light**

Jesus' friends who admit their spiritual arrogance have Him to defend us before the Father. His defense is absolutely 100% effective because, we're told, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world," (2:2). The big takeaway here is that even though He died once on the cross for all sins – Christ in some mysterious, amazing way, continues to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins and those of the world. In this Easter season, followers of Jesus remember how His death rescued us from the darkness we love and brought us into some semblance of the Light that characterizes Almighty God. We also remember and celebrate how the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead confirmed our Heavenly Father's approval of the saving work Christ did on our behalf.

God doesn't just forgive our stubborn attraction to spiritual darkness. He also purifies us. He cleans us up when we admit we've sinned against Him. Not only that, but God puts His own Holy Spirit inside us, to transform and change us from people of the darkness into people of the light. Simply put, He takes Jesus' adopted siblings and makes us increasingly like our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He calls us to walk in the light of His grace.

Daylight Savings Time cannot replace one second of darkness with light. But our Heavenly Father's in the business of replacing spiritual darkness with His light. Our response as His adopted children is an essential part of what life looks like considering the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In other words, we die with Him in the tomb, and we are raised to a new life with Him – one focused on bringing Him glory by loving God and neighbor. God doesn't just put to death our love for the darkness. By His grace, He raises us to a light-filled life of faithful obedience and makes us better reflections of His own image.

**Prayer:** Light of the world: Shine upon us and disperse the clouds of our selfishness, that we may reflect the power of the resurrection in our life together. Amen.