

*How clear does it need to be.* A sermon preached at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC on October 23, 2016 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: LEVITICUS 19:18

I JOHN 2:7-11

JOHN 13: 33-35

Have you ever been in a situation, where you are explaining what you believe to be quite straightforward and after about the third time of explaini8ng,

There is still a confused and glazed – deer in headlights – look on the other person's face.

You believe you have spoken clearly, slowly, chosen your words carefully

Maybe used your hands for added effect.

But still the person or people don't get the point,

Make the connection,

Or understand what you are trying to tell them.

Sometimes our explanations are not as clear as WE think they are.

So, after a time, what do we do?

We raise our voices, though the other person's ability to hear has not changed

Our little hand gestures, become big and often threatening motions.

And finally we blurt out words like “what do I have to do, draw a picture for you of gone to the store!!!!”

That response rarely produces the desired effect – usually the other person shuts down, Walks away or responds in an equally curt verbal way.

What do I have to do, draw a picture, gone to the store?

How clear does it have to be before you hear and see what I am telling you?

This is important – are you just obtuse or thick?

As I read the gospels – particularly the Gospel of Mark – where Jesus’ disciples are terribly obtuse to what Jesus is saying,

I marvel that Jesus did not lose it more times with the disciples.

Yes, he is the Son of God,

But he is also born of a human mother.

In time the disciples would “get it” so to speak, but often not at the first telling.

By the time John writes the letter we have been looking at these past several weeks,

Jesus has risen,

John has been first hand witness to this,

The Spirit has descended upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost

And the Christian church is growing.

Yet, there is a sense as you read these three letters of John that the faithful are slipping back to old ways – the world’s ways  
Or not being serious about the new ways – the ways of Jesus.

The entire first letter builds upon the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of chapter 1 in the first letter  
**We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (vs.3)**

Every matter that John addresses to his readers then and now is for this purpose – fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

Everything he writes points the way that this can happen and can be maintained.

The advancement of the Kingdom of God will not then depend upon some grand movement,  
But on very ordinary people – , who are open to;  
allow themselves to be led by the Holy Spirit and the power of God.

People who like those first followers of Jesus are prone to mistakes, mis-statements, wrong attitudes, lapses of faith, bitter failure, wanting to be more important than others

In other words, people just like you and me.  
So, again, John’s letter is not some academic paper of some Bible times symposium

It is not addressed to the theologically trained – though they better hear it.

It is addressed to “fighting in the trenches” folk like us.

And though one may say many things about John’s letter,

One cannot say it is vague or obtuse

Jim’s reading this morning cannot really be more clearer can it?

<sup>9</sup>Whoever says, ‘I am in the light’, while hating a brother or sister,<sup>[a]</sup> is still in the darkness. <sup>10</sup>Whoever loves a brother or sister<sup>[b]</sup> lives in the light, and in such a person<sup>[c]</sup> there is no cause for stumbling. <sup>11</sup>But whoever hates another believer<sup>[d]</sup> is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

Or to quote the same text from Eugene Peterson’s The Message

<sup>9-11</sup> Anyone who claims to live in God’s light and hates a brother or sister is still in the dark. It’s the person who loves brother and sister who dwells in God’s light and doesn’t block the light from others. But whoever hates is still in the dark, stumbles around in the dark, doesn’t know which end is up, blinded by the darkness.

Clear enough? Crystal!!

BUT...and I expect John's readers then and now would add...you don't know some of the brothers and sisters in Christ in my community.

I think John did and does – then and now.

For John is a disciple – and the disciples were not all sweetness and light.

As I said, as I read the gospels I see how often their humanity, their insensitivity, their brashness and arrogance gets in the way of the power, mystery and wonder of God.

John KNOWS the potential destructiveness and corrosiveness of the world and its voices.

John also knows that if we as brothers and sisters in Christ cannot or will not love our brothers and sisters in Christ,

We really have nothing to say to a wider and very needy of God's love world!

John knew, as each of us come to know that being part of a community of faith is a basic spiritual fact for those who confess Jesus as Lord. It is not an option!

God does not make private, secret salvation deals with his people.

God's relationship to us is personal and intimate  
But it is not private

When we become Christians we are among brothers and sisters in faith

No Christian is an only child!

Just because we are a family of faith (to continue to image) does not mean that we are always one big happy family  
 Our brothers and sisters in faith are not always nice people

Not one of us stops sinning the moment we believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Of course most if not all of us are aware of God's grace in our lives,

We are sensitive to God's provision of all our needs and a considerable number of our wants

But all of us have cranky moments!

Every one of us has the capability and the capacity of ticking off each other.

When Katharine began her public pastoral ministry,

I still had a year to go at seminary

She was therefore appointed within a day's travel distance of Toronto.

Her appointment was to a two church pastoral charge about 40 miles north of the 401 – or about an hour and a half driving time to Toronto.

One of the churches she served was in the transition phase of moving from country to suburban – ruburbia

The other congregation was much smaller in attendance though if I remember larger in size--remained traditional southern Ontario rural.

Every Sunday that I was able to attend the rural congregation, their Clerk of Session – an affable and kindly man named Bill who had farmed all his life – sat next to me. As Clerk of Session to the minister’s husband, he felt it was his place and his alone.

Every Sunday as he sat down he would look around at the 15=20 people in attendance and say, “Before Church Union, this church used to be filled”

[Union happened in 1925-Katharine was appointed to Hillsburgh and Price’s Corners in 1979]

First few times Bill said it, I was touched by the nostalgia

After about the 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday he said, I became agitated.

Same sentence – a lament really – to begin worship. And we all know that unbridled nostalgia is a great killer of hope!

Bill was such a genial person; I hesitated to say anything directly to him about this Sunday lament.

But it was frustrating to hear – every week and it was an exercise in grace and patience not to blurt out – Bill it is 1979 – get over it!!

I have known communities of faith that exist  
it seems only because they are united in spite over  
someone or something,

Or are trapped in a longing for the good old days!

Some of our brothers and sisters in the faith  
are dull

And others are a drag.

But at the same time, our Lord tells us that  
they are our brothers and sisters in faith.

If God is my Father, then this is my family!!

This morning John picks up an essential  
element **of fellowship with the Father and with his  
Son Jesus Christ.**

Using one of his favoured images of light and  
darkness,

He links them to love and hatred respectively

within the community of faith – then and now!

For John there is no middle ground – the person  
loves or the person hates!!

Let's begin with the bad stuff first –

**darkness** – hate

It is clear that John wants his readers to be under no  
illusion of how deadly hate is in the life of the  
individual believers and in any community of  
faith – for hate is transferable!!

How so?

Hate is nothing less than a feeling of extreme hostility or extreme dislike of someone or something.

And it is such a cutting; no discussion is possible word isn't it?

Such a demeaning and dismissive word!

Hate can be active in that we indulge in malicious talk or injurious actions toward another

In hate, we can actually strike people, beat them, throw garbage at them, flip them the bird or give them the finger.

But hate can also be expressed passively.

It can be expressed by indifference,

By coldness,

By isolation .

By exclusion,

Unconcern for another

It has been said that indifference is the cruelest form of hate

Read the Gospels – what hurt Jesus most was not the plotting of his death,

But the coldness and indifference of those who once followed him, yet turned aside from him and stood by as he was crucified.

John couples the word hate, with 'darkness'

Hate will hide and cover up possibilities, and opportunities before us,

For hate will make us focus on grievances,

Ever noticed how unloving people are always finding problems and troubles  
 They always see insults and slights where such do not exist  
 People walking in darkness are always upset about something.

Are always “put out”

Always “stumbling around” as if there are moving about in darkness....

Hatred grips people and consumes the present.

Hate and love cannot co-exist together says John.

To hate is to deliberately cut yourself off from

God – cut yourself off from hope, forgiveness, mercy, grace, love – God’s love.

Hate is to remain under the burden of guilt

It is to remain self-indulgent and self-absorbed

THIS IS NOT THE WAY GOD’S PEOPLE ARE MEANT TO LIVE.

THIS IS NOT THE ATTITUDE THAT IS TO REMAIN THE DEFAULT ONE FOR GOD’S PEOPLE.

John reminds his readers – then and now –

...I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining (vs. 8)

Such light -the light which is nothing less than Jesus Christ – is most clearly seen in the love of God through Jesus Christ for all people

A love that as we absorb and allow to percolate into our lives, we are to show and display to all others – first to our brothers and sisters in Christ – the community of faith,

And then to the wider world.

John makes it very clear that nice words are not enough, if they are not accompanied by tangible expressions of love

Now, John is under no illusion that to show the love of Jesus is sometimes really difficult!!!!

Even though it is the right way to live – I mean who wants to stumble around in darkness, when the option of light is clearly there

It can be a real challenge betimes.

For our brothers and sisters in Christ still do and say things that make us wince or scream

Too often, we still shoot our wounded by our actions and words

Too often we still build emotional and psychological walls that prevent the very people who need Jesus from getting closer to him

John does not give a **list of how one is to love a brother or sister in Christ,**  
**How one is to live in the light.**

I believe though it would be wrong to leave this text this morning without suggesting how this might be done.

This is not by any means an exhaustive or prioritized list,

Here goes,

Living in the light, loving a brother or sister in Christ means *to walk in openness and honesty before God.*

*For we can be perfectly orthodox, but still be unloving. It means that constantly we recall how much love God has shown to us as individuals in spite of our sinful thoughts, words and behaviours.*

The degree to which we have absorbed the love of God, his forgiveness, his mercy, his grace, his provision in our lives first, without any action on our part.,

To that same degree we will be able to show such things to other people.

*It means admitting to ourselves and to God, that this living in the light is really difficult at times – we are going to need God's help through the Holy Spirit to move forward.*

*Drawing from God – as do the branches from the Vine in the image we spoke about two weeks ago.*

*It means acknowledging that this side of heaven, we will never be PERFECT lovers,*

*BUT we can be real lovers through faith in the future grace of Jesus*