

**Scripture and Message**  
**14 April 2024**

**Scripture: 1 John 1:1-2:2**

<sup>1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, and seen with our eyes, and have looked at and touched with our hands: the Word, who is Life—this is the subject of our letter. <sup>2</sup> That life came to be; we saw it and bear witness to it. We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with Abba God and was manifested to us. <sup>3</sup> What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you may be one with us – as we are one with Abba God and with the Only Begotten, Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> We write this to fulfill our joy.

<sup>5</sup> This, then, is the message we heard from Jesus and declare to you: God is light, and in God there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we say we have intimacy with God while still living in darkness, we are liars and do not live in truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we live in the light, as God is in the light, we are one with each other, and the blood of Jesus, the Only Begotten, purifies us from all sin.

<sup>8</sup> If we say we are without sin, we lie, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> But if we admit our sins, God, the faithful and just One, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all injustice. <sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we call God a liar, and show that God’s Word is not in us.

<sup>2:1</sup> My little ones, I am writing this to keep you from sin. But if anyone should sin, we have an Advocate with God - Jesus Christ, who is just. <sup>2</sup> Jesus is the full payment for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for those of the whole world.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Message: We Walk in the Light**

How many here watched the eclipse on Monday? Were you somewhere you could see it? The Hays family went to Montezuma Wildlife Refuge in hopes of clearer skies. No luck. Although there were hundreds, if not thousands of people in the refuge with us. And every once and a while the clouds would part, and people would cheer for the brief glimpse of the moon partially blocking out the sun. Then it started to get dark. And it got really dark. And the crickets started to sing with the peepers as the birds quieted for our very special short ‘night’. And then the sun came back.

According to what I have heard and read, many people felt this eclipse was almost a holy moment – or at least a moment of great spirituality. People cried from the beauty – from the awesome dance of our galaxy. People who never met one another felt close to each other as they experienced this wonder of God’s creation together. It was a God moment for me as well – with all the people in Montezuma I ended up sitting next to a couple from one of my previous churches! It was good to catch up with them again! It was good to remember – to realize the bonds of our greater community – the church.

Being with a crowd of eclipse watchers was a fun way to see God’s grand show of light and darkness. John, the writer of this pastoral epistle, loved the binary choice between darkness and light. But as we saw during the eclipse, for every moment of true darkness or total light, there were many other moments of grey – you can’t live in upstate NY with its perpetual cloud cover and not know this truth.

John, however, wants to make decisions binary – and whatever we think about that there is still much we can learn from this pastoral letter. Throughout this month, we are asking the question, “How Shall We Live?” as we explore the lectionary texts from 1 John. This short season is an opportunity to explore how our way of life is consistent with God’s invitation to us to live as part of Creation and as part of the greater church community. We will look for opportunities to align our lives more fully with God’s interconnected and interdependent Creation.

Annnd ... It's after Easter. Holy Week is behind us once again, The high holy day is over we're back to normal – whatever that means. We are now back where we live, still basking in the glow of Easter, still living the promise of Easter, but also back to our ordinary living – back to the almost spring and weeks of mud and rain before we can look forward to summer. This is why now is a good time to ask ourselves how we shall live. Easter came; Resurrection happened; so what? It's like that old evangelist who supposedly said, "I don't care how high you jumped on the night you got saved, I want to know how straight you walked when you came back down."

John asks us how straight we will walk in the light of Easter. What matters is whether we are going to listen to the words of Jesus and learn to walk. How shall we live now that Easter has come? Now that life has changed and Resurrection is real, how do we reflect that new reality as we walk about in this life every day of our existence? These are the questions John asks.

But John has to work up to it, of course. You can't just leap into the meat of the argument right away. John takes a moment to get to the point. A classic preacher technique! But it also ties in with the beginning of the Gospel and indeed the whole biblical text: in the beginning. John puts it this way, "<sup>1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, and seen with our eyes, and have looked at and touched with our hands: the Word, who is Life—this is the subject of our letter. <sup>2</sup> That life came to be; we saw it and bear witness to it." John isn't interested in the beginning as a remembrance of the past, a reflection on what was, but instead on what is now revealed. The promise of life is now open to all; the life is accessible; the gift is within reach because of Jesus' death and resurrection. And the new reality in which we now live is one surrounded by joy. That's what John declares to us in these opening verses. "<sup>4</sup> We write this to fulfill our joy." John says to the ancient church and to us.

This new resurrection reality carries possibilities and responsibilities. The possibilities include fellowship—two-tiered fellowship at that. We have fellowship with Christ, with Jesus, and then we have fellowship with one another. What a great bonus; rather, what an amazing design. We tend to want to focus on the individual. We imagine that faith is a personal thing, an internal thing, a me and Jesus thing. But the Bible consistently reminds us that faith is a community thing. We are in this together. We support one another; we encourage one another, and we disciple one another all along the way. We are not alone in our journey of faith. We have fellowship with one another—if we walk in the light.

Seems straightforward, doesn't it? Just walk. In the light. Simple and straightforward, right? We wish. How do we walk in the light? For me, Robyn, to understand this, I like to make an editorial change in that last word – light. I prefer to use another word that John likes to throw around – love. My question is always, "How do we walk in love?"

Last week – during spring break – Jo and I drove almost 1000 miles around New England looking at schools. We had many chances to see what walking in the light, - or walking in Love – looks like. We – or I mean I – also had an opportunity to try and practice what I preach – yeah, I know, surprising huh! We visited 4 schools in 4 states in 5 days. We stayed in big multi-storied hotels, a home turned into a bed and breakfast, and in a run-down motel. We ate at college hangouts, a small halal restaurant, and I even learned how to Grubhub food to be delivered to the rundown motel. We met people from all walks of life and faiths in some stressful as well as joyful times. But where I had the worst time remembering my Christian duty to love and respect and be kind to others was on the road – while driving – or on the last day as we drove home – to be kind while we sat in traffic – also known as moving parking lots.

I don't know what it is about driving a car, but it seems to be the worst place for bad behavior excepting social media. People drive on the medians – honk at the people who are just as stuck as they are – drive up on

your bumper if you are not driving fast enough. I can remember driving down one parkway 10 miles over the speed limit with cars racing past me as if I were standing still – they had to be going at least 80. I remember sitting in the traffic for miles to realize the traffic was due to going down to one lane - and people would pull out of the correct lane to drive up as far as they could in the merging lane only to try and merge back in as they ran out of road. Some drivers would allow them back in – others were visibly upset by this behavior. I remember one old sedan trying to straddle the line – so no cars could pass him – and some big pickup truck still insisting on going around him – much honking ensued.

And yes, it is annoying to watch people zip on by. And it isn't the safest thing – and it is also unsafe to drive in two lanes to try and force other people into good behavior. And it is so tempting to yell at the other drivers in the safety of your own car. But really as I was driving, I had to keep telling myself to act in love. And not yell at the other drivers that they needed to go back to Sunday School and learn some manners!

What would John have us do? What would Jesus do? How can I/we walk or drive in love? Am I really going to get where I am going that much sooner if I cut that guy off or if I try to sneak ahead in the merging line? What can I do to lower stress for those around me? Because we are all interconnected. We all will get through the traffic slow down eventually – just listen to some music and if you want to annoy the teenager riding shotgun – sing along!

John is asking us what kind of impact do we have on the world around us—the physical and the human? What example do we give of how we are to live in this world? Are we light and salt, or not. Remember, this isn't just about you, the individual you, the “you and Jesus” you. This is about the community of faith, the fellowship we all have with each other. Community is at the heart of the faith. We are not left to navigate this discipleship journey all by ourselves. We do it together, in partnership with the whole community of faith. We are part of a body. Yes, we have our individual roles to play, gifts to use, decisions to make, but the more we understand the interwoven nature of human community, the more we get a glimpse of what it means to live in the kingdom of heaven. When we acknowledge that our choices about lifestyle impact people on the other side of the planet, we catch something of what living as one body really means.

It is like a forest of trees. Trees live in community with each other because of a fungi that lives in their root systems. Mycorrhizal fungi networks give trees community. Trees can be in community with one another? How could that be?” Suzanne Simard’s research writes about the interconnection between trees, facilitated through an underground network of mycorrhizal fungi that grow on their roots. These fungi allow trees to share resources with one another and care for the more vulnerable ones. For example, in a drought, young trees might receive water molecules from older, more robust trees that have enough to share with the younger, more vulnerable ones. This creates strength and security for the whole arboreal community. Because they can share resources, they create a community of mutual flourishing.

Perhaps this also reveals a deep truth about living in community with humans and all Creation. What would we see if we were to remove the barriers, the dirt - that obscures our connections and reveal instead our interconnected social systems—our family ties, our friends, our congregations, and on a larger scale, our society? What markers would we see there indicating that we belong to one another, that our joy is dependent on your joy, my flourishing on your flourishing?

This is where the joy is to be found. In our mutual flourishing. Walk, says John, walk in such a way that those around you are enlightened. Walk, says John, walk in such a way that the world is left a better place – cleaner, sustainable, abundant. Walk, says John, because we are people of the Resurrection who know that death is not the final word but a promise of new life. Walk in the light and love of Christ.