

John 5 sermon -Tregear – 19.9.2021

You're probably sick of hearing stuff about pandemics. But I heard something very interesting this week. Did you know that in the first 3 centuries of the church, the church grew the significantly during the 2 pandemics of the 2nd & 3rd century. In 165-180 there the Antonine Plague which they think was smallpox and then in 251-266 another plague, probably measles. The writer of the book argues that the behaviour of the Christians during these crises, motivated by their love for their neighbours, saw the proportion of Christians in the population grow significantly.

So as we finish 1 John today what can we take away as helpful to us in this time of pandemic.

PRAY

v.1 – who is born of God? – those who believe that Jesus is the Christ(Messiah) & love the Father's children

So the question seems to be, how do I know that I am in God, born of God, his child? Do you remember back to 3:23 – believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Saviour and love as he has commanded. And then 4:15 – Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the son of God, God lives in them and they in God...and whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them." These two things are repeated constantly in John's letter. And here it is again in v.1 - "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ or the Saviour or Messiah (all alternatives) is born of God, that is, is a child of God; and everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well." We love God the Father so we love his children. . Remember in chapter 4 John says in v. 19, "we love because he first loved us". God worked in us, woke us up to the truth about Jesus; the truth that, as the Messiah-King, Jesus died to save us and he now rules and we recognise by faith that he is King. And so John can say in v.2, we love the Father who put his love in us and so we'll also have love for other believers, "we love the children of God."

And John goes on to remind his hearers, this is what God has commanded. Don't forget, he says, we're called to love. And we have seen these last 2 weeks what love is like. Those 15 qualities from v.4-7 in 1 Cor 13; chap 3 & 4 of John's letter – love is the mark of the follower of Jesus. I need to be learning from God what it means to love. He is the great teacher; he has shown us how to love; he continues to love and love will last forever.

In a way it's very simple. The test of whether we love God's children is - a)do we love God? b) do we keep his commands? What John seems to be stressing in v.2&3, as he does throughout his letter, is that our belief in Jesus is the direct result of God acting on us in a transforming way.

v.4 – everyone born of God overcomes the world – in what sense do we overcome the world? Our faith – the simple truth is that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God. What does that mean for my everyday living? Jesus has overcome Satan, he has overcome the world. His life, his truth is now poured into us. He is the one transforming us. I think The Message is helpful here: “The conquering power that brings the world to its knees is our faith. The person who wins out over the world's ways is simply the one who believes Jesus is the Son of God.” Now, as you hear this you're thinking, I don't see this. I see Christians persecuted around the world; they don't seem to be conquering.

What does this mean for my everyday life. I was struck by the phrase in 1 Corinthians 13:7 – “Love always trusts” OR “Trusts God always”. In the light of what we know about Jesus, that he is the conqueror, we CAN trust him for ALL that happens in my life. Not always easy is it? I don't want pain; I want life to be easy. Is God for Me? In everything that happens in my life? I heard this week about the history of the early church. The historian who had looked at the writings of the Christians for the first 200-300 years after Jesus said this. There were 4 main reasons Christianity expanded. Number One – the virtue of patience was emphasized in the early church. Because God is patient and Jesus embodied patience they concluded that we should be patient, “not controlling events, not anxious or in a hurry, and never using force to achieve their ends”. Remember what Paul listed as the first quality in his list of 15 in 1

Corinthians 13 – Love is patient. The world’s way is to dominate, to control, to conquer. John says look at Jesus; he conquered by dying on the cross. We conquer by showing love ; love is patient, trusting in the One who has all power.

The second factor for the growth of Christianity was their lifestyle. They trained themselves to love and show behaviours resulting in consistent Christian lifestyle. It wasn’t the persuasive words of the Christians that convinced people, but it was their lives, distinctive lives of love that were so different to the society around them. Now that challenges me. In this time of Covid and also of more and more voices wanting social change I think the call is for us to be patient, not passive, but patiently confident in the One who has the ultimate power. And to love – love God and to love others.

This is the church that John is writing this letter to. He hasn’t got a complicated message. But, remember, he wants them to know that they are children of God and what they have been called to as God’s children.

v.6-8 – this is the first of our tricky passages this morning. There are many different ideas out there. What is John meaning? There are three testimonies to Jesus - testimony of water, blood and the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus is the focus and remember all the way through his letter he’s been reminding his readers that Jesus is fully man and fully God. I think it is very likely that John is answering a heresy, or wrong teaching, that said that God’s nature only came upon Jesus in the waters of baptism and then left Jesus before the cross and the resurrection. This is a heresy because it denies the reality of the incarnation and John is saying No, the one person Jesus Christ who we witnessed to is 100% man and 100% God, and this is witnessed to both through his baptism and his cross and resurrection. The Holy Spirit also bears witness to the reality of his person and his human and divine nature. These are historical incidences of his death and baptism. There is a possibility that John is confirming that God came into the world at Jesus’ birth. v.6 should be translated, “This is the one who came **through**(not by) the water.” He may be saying Jesus came through the breaking of waters at his birth and then he went into death and came through death to be resurrected. But I’m going to stick with it

probably referring to the baptism of Jesus by John – remember we read about this in Matthew 3, back in February. Two things about this. This baptism of John's was a baptism of repentance, admitting you're a sinner before God. Jesus is publicly identifying himself as a sinner, not because he is but that he will become sin for us.

No God does this – but Jesus, God come to earth, does do this. John is telling us he becomes human, fully human, so that he can become sin for us on the cross. But at the same time, at his baptism, the Father says, "This is my beloved Son." God is telling everyone that this Jesus who has become fully human is also fully God. An incredibly significant occasion that John is now referring to as a testimony of who Jesus is. And the Spirit also testifies on that occasion by appearing as a dove on Jesus; but not only that but testifying to us in our hearts of the truth about Jesus. The testimony of the blood is clearly referring to Jesus' death on the cross. He goes through death and enters the world again resurrected. And it is this resurrection power that John the writer of this letter is a witness to. And it is this resurrection that enables John to write in v.11 – *"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."* We have eternal life, a resurrected life because of Jesus' resurrection. John hasn't talked specifically much about Jesus' resurrection in this letter but one of the key proofs that he was the Son of God was his resurrection. And if we are in Christ, one of Christ's followers, then we have life, new life here but also eternal life with God as his loved children forever. v.9-10 – we believe human testimony; how much more should we believe God's testimony.

Belief, again, is the key thing. We confirm God's testimony when we believe in Jesus. And I'm not talking about a belief like, "Oh, yeah, I believe that the Panthers can beat the Storm next Sat." or something innocuous like that. This is something far more significant; we believe that the almighty God has come into the world to save us from certain death, because we couldn't do it, nothing on earth could save us. This is life changing stuff. Penrith will play again next year and so on. It won't change my life. But going to an eternity without Jesus! I don't want that. Jesus is my Saviour, my King. And that's a belief that changes the whole orientation of my life. I now have a hope, I now have a future, I am now a child of the King. My trust is in Jesus the King.

v. v.13-15 – Why am I writing, says John? So that you will know with no doubt that you have eternal life; and that you can enter into God’s presence boldly, freely asking according to his will. Absolute confidence. We know that God hears us as we talk with him according to his will. This is pretty similar to the verses in chapter 3:22. God, our Father, hears us. The key is we are tuned in to him and we are asking according to his will. We want his will; we want what he wants as he is changing us – the fact that he hears us is enough for us; we know he loves us, we know he desires our best (my goodness, he died on the cross for me!!); I can leave my requests with him and trust him.

And now John says some tough things with regard to prayer in v.16-17. These are difficult verses, not sure exactly what John is meaning. He says, If we see our Christian brother or sister sinning we pray for them, that God would help them; and God gives life to the Christian. But don’t pray for the fatal sin. Don’t pray for the person who is rejecting God, whose sin leads to death. Seems a bit confusing – why wouldn’t we want to pray for the ones who are perishing? We should pray for victory over sin on behalf of “a *brother* [i.e., a fellow Christian] committing a sin.” But we cannot pray for victory over sin on behalf of one who rejects Christ, the ones who are committing the sin that leads to death. I’m not sure what it means exactly but here are some thoughts that might help.

John is giving them assurance which leads to confident prayer. So John’s saying, Here’s an example of a prayer that we can pray with confidence – praying for someone who is sinning. When you see someone else sinning don’t gossip about them, don’t judge them but pray for them. This is something that we can be confident of that God wants us to do; that God wants to use us as instruments that we might, through him, through his power and in response to our prayer, that he might give to them life; that he might restore them to health and strength.

And, of course there is debate about what this “sin to death” is but I think John is just qualifying in the light of the rest of the letter where he’s been talking about people who have been denying that Jesus is the Christ, been teaching heresy about him, who have been living

lovelessly. And these were visible members of the Christian community. he's saying, "Oh wait, I'm not teaching about praying for that kind of thing with confidence. There are people who are running down the road to eternal death who so deny any claim they have to relationship with God that you can't pray with confidence about them. I'm not talking about them. I'm talking about people for whom you can have confidence in talking about them.

v.18 – 20 – Three affirmations – “We know” 1. We know are born of God and we are kept safe in him. No one can take us out of God's hand. 2. We know are children of God. And the world is under the control of Satan. But we are different from the world; we have our being in Jesus. 3. We know that the son of God has come and has given us understanding and continues to do so in the Holy Spirit, so that WE MAY KNOW HIM WHO IS TRUE. I am in you, Lord. Every move I make, every thought, every part of me is connected to you.

If I am born of God I am fully protected by God; held firm by God. God gives us understanding so that we can know Jesus and know what is true.

And we are in Jesus -he is the true God and eternal life.

Oh, and one last thing, v.21 – keep yourselves from idols. Interesting way to finish off the letter. In the next 2 letters John sends, which are much shorter he says in 2 John - ¹³ *The children of your sister, who is chosen by God, send their greetings.* And in 3 John - *Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.* much more normal farewell words.

So why this ending or rather what's the significance of this ending? He's just said We know we're born of God, children of God and know the truth about God, specifically about Jesus. You know the truth about Jesus, fully human and fully God; died and rose again, saved us from sin. Don't reject him like some of your brother Jews have done saying he's not really risen or he's a failed Messiah. These guys are choosing to set up their own ways of thinking about God,

about Jesus. They're saying you can live in sin, it doesn't matter. And it also doesn't matter if you hate your brother. They're not making statues or making other gods like a monkey or elephant God, but what they're doing is equally idolatry. The Greek word for idols has the idea of "false conceptions" or "false ideas". What they're saying is, "I prefer to think of Jesus this way...I like to think of God as whatever...when God has revealed himself to us to not be that. John's saying, Don't be like them and worship your own preference of God, a made up God, a God made in your own image.

As we finish up John's letter, John is reminding his hearers and us today what is the true family likeness of those who believe in Jesus. Well, we understand who God is. We know this because we know who Jesus is, the truth about Jesus. We're not playing religion or belonging to a nice religious club. We ARE children of God; only in Him can we have real life now and eternal life. Our sins are forgiven and we are no longer under the control of Satan; and our lives will be characterised by love, the love that God gives us.

PRAY:

Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to you, in every way.

Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.

Spirit, help me to love that the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.