

Motivated by the Resurrection

Our second Scripture reading on this Second Sunday of Easter, is 1 John 1:1-4. The Apostle John begins this short letter with an introduction that expresses his motivation for writing. This motivation is the same that should drive us all as followers of Jesus—his resurrection.

We read 1 John 1:1-4:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—² this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—³ 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.⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Evidence abounds, both in Scripture and the history of the church, for the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. But to me, one of the most convincing is the transformation in the first followers of Jesus, who were defeated by his crucifixion and death, and after his resurrection appearances, became an indomitable band of followers, devoted to his witness and mission, even unto death by martyrdom. Here in our Scripture text we read the words of the aged Apostle John as he uncovers his true motivation for writing this letter, with clearly no sign of being burnt out or having lost his genuine concern for others. John's example challenges us to look into our own hearts, to see the degree of our motivation as followers of Christ. This motivation is the antidote for burnout, for losing heart in the Christian life. This isn't a "flash in the pan" burst of enthusiasm, but rather is the impetus for lifelong faithfulness.

As in his gospel, John thinks of the living Word, Christ, as the eternal Son becoming a man, a man whom John knew well. John was one of the disciples, the followers and learners of Jesus, walking with him for three years, and then finally standing with Jesus' mother, Mary, at the foot of the cross. He experienced first-hand the humanity of Jesus, as he walked, talked and ate with him and as he saw him perform miracles that were signs to illustrate his stupendous claims as the great *I Am* of God. And John was a witness to the risen Lord, who appeared to his disciples in his resurrection body, given them his instructions, blessings and fellowship during the 40 days prior to his ascension.

The world today continues to be offended by the idea that the only Savior of the world came to us as a human, in the eyes of the world a common man, of humble Palestinian birth, living a mere 33 years and suffering a disgraceful death. The purpose of the incarnation of Christ was not to provide simply a great moral example. The goal of the Christ event, as Jesus himself said, was to give his life as a ransom sacrifice for many (Matt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45). It was necessary, Christ said, that he suffer and die for us, that we might be forgiven and given the gift of new life. In fulfillment of Scripture, Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, who took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. He was pierced on the cross for our sins (Is. 53:4-6). And the resurrection of Jesus is God's declaration that our sin problem has been solved. The death of Jesus was God's sacrifice for us, and the resurrection gave the power

for our new life and reconciliation with God (Rom. 4:25). The resurrection of the Son of God is not an ideal in our imagination, but was a real, historical event that transformed the disciples from fearful victims into courageous victors. And, when anyone turns to Christ, trusting in him as Savior and following him as Lord, the resurrection happens! We're not only made right with holy God, but as Paul writes, we're enabled to live daily in the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:19-20).

John writes with assurance because of his life with Jesus, not by second-hand information about him, but rather through his senses of hearing, seeing and touching. As the *Amplified Bible* says, John and the other disciples "gazed upon" Jesus for themselves (1). They saw him as eyewitnesses (2) and were not followers because of what someone else told them. And although we're millennia removed from this time in history and are not privileged to experience Jesus' physical presence, we're nevertheless given the reality of faith and certitude, which motivates us to live for Christ and others.

When the risen Jesus invited the at-first skeptical disciple Thomas to touch the scars in his hands and side, he confessed his faith in Jesus as his Lord and God. Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn. 20:27-29). Through the Word and the Spirit, we can have the certitude of faith for ourselves. Real faith can't be second-hand, such as the "faith" passed on through parents or well-meaning pastors, who have taught us and encouraged us to believe. Saving faith is a first-hand encounter that comes when we fully consider, i.e., to "gaze upon" (1) the person and claims of Christ, who then will impart a personal experience of faith that he blesses, even more than he blessed those with him in the Upper Room (Jn. 20:29).

It may not be emotionally charged, but the new relationship with Jesus is real. John uses sensory words to underscore the fact that his faith was not just his adherence to and agreement with facts about Jesus, but was a love relationship with him. John was known as the Beloved Disciple, who had enjoyed a special relationship with Jesus during his earthly ministry, and now he was continuing in to know Christ and even in deeper ways than when Jesus was with him in the flesh.

In our text John uses the word fellowship, *koinonia*, the common life we share together, a life meant to be shared with God and one another. Indeed this *koinonia* is the life of God himself within us that binds us together as his people in his family. And with this word he uses the word "joy." Our pleasure is found, not in the fallen human nature in an effort to gratify the appetites of the sinful flesh. Rather, our pleasure is to be found in our relationship with and our delight in God, who first has delighted in us. God offers us the pleasure of his presence with us and within us (Ps. 16:11). Again, Jesus doesn't just love us theologically, but he actually *likes* us, i.e. takes delight in us and enjoys being with us each moment of every day.

Before John was called the Beloved Disciple, Jesus named him and his brother the "Sons of Thunder" (Mk. 3:17). They were the "hell-fire and brimstone boys who wanted Jesus' permission to call down fire upon the unresponsive Samaritans (Lk. 9:54). And John, along with James, and in collusion with their mother, ambitiously

sought to be promoted in rank to Jesus' right side of authority over others (Mk. 10:35-45; Matt. 20:20-28, etc.). Something happened to John. It was a life-changing experience of dying to the old sinful nature and gradually, by the inner working of the Holy Spirit, becoming more in love with Jesus and more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit came into John and began giving him a heart like Jesus' heart, one that loves God, delights in his presence and yearns to love others into the kingdom. John wrote as a man whose life was in the process of conversion, and that transformation is what motivated him to have a heart for others.

My trip to the Holy Land in 1988 was a great time of inspiration, even though I can't say it was life-changing. It was indeed a moving experience to walk where Jesus walked, and cross the Galilee, that he crossed so many times with his disciples. It was even emotional to stand outside Gordon's tomb, wondering if perhaps this was the place where he rose from the dead. But it's far more impressive to realize the Lord of glory is actually dwelling inside our hearts, that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that Christ within us is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). The very thought that the Holy Spirit comes to live within us, making us temples of the living God, "ought to make us shiver in our shoes" (NT Wright). A trip to the Holy Land is optional, but knowing Jesus lives in us is essential for motivation in following Jesus.

Every mortal has "*bios*" life, but only the twice-born are given new "*zoe*," eternal life, a spiritual *quality* of life. By grace through our faith in Jesus we're given this new life in him. Paul even goes so far as to say that Christ is our life. He encompasses all of our life, filling our person and shaping our character, and dictating our agendas and qualifying our relationships. And we discover more and more that life can never be the same again. He wants to keep giving more of himself, replacing more of our old sinful nature, until we can say, "Christ *is* life to me (Col. 3:4; Phil. 1:21).

The Message paraphrase captures how John's focus is now outward, and the passion he has now is to share Christ with others:

"The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us. We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so that you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy!"

The primary verb in our text is "proclaim." The Good News of Jesus awaits and seeks to be shared openly with the world. The Christian life is personal but not private. We come to know Christ personally, but as Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, we're also made aware of the worth of every individual soul, and that personal faith begs to be shared with others. As John wrote these words about proclaiming and testifying to others about the Good News, he was no doubt aware of the infinite value of every human soul. In the words of CS Lewis, there are no mere mortals. Everyone we chance to meet or even to see on the busy street is an immortal soul, destined to become like Jesus or like Satan himself, because even now they are in his grip.

John is anxious to testify and proclaim the message of Jesus so people can understand. It's as though he is saying, "We proclaim to you exactly what we too have seen and heard" (3). Just as he wrote in his gospel account, his purpose was

that his readers might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in his name (Jn. 20:31).

If we were fully in love with Christ, and found deep joy in him and a daily walk with him that is fresh and alive, would we not necessarily yearn for others to know him in the same way? And would not our hearts spill over with obvious love for others, manifest in simple acts of thoughtful kindness? If Christ Jesus were as precious to us as he desires to be, and if our hearts delighted in him as they were redeemed to do, the language of our hearts and lives would speak out, "I want you to know the one I know and to have the life and joy that he alone can give."

Several years ago the Chicago Tribune printed an intriguing story about twin baby girls who had been abandoned on a sidewalk in China. A suburban Chicago couple went to China to adopt one of these little girls, not knowing she had a twin sister. They named their adopted baby Mia. The following year a couple from Miami went to the same city to adopt a little girl who also had been abandoned in the same spot in front of a textile factory. One of these couples wrote about their daughter's upcoming birthday on an Internet site for parents who had adopted from the same orphanage in Yangzhou. After a series of e-mails, what these adoptive parents had suspected was later confirmed through DNA testing. These girls, who amazingly had both been named Mia by their adoptive parents from the north and south of the US, were fraternal twins, separated hours after their birth. Now years later they met at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. As the parents watched as these little girls, dressed identically for this meeting through the parents communication with each other, they were in awe. "To me, it's a divine thing. It's a miracle. In the sea of humanity, these kids found one another," said one of the mothers.

The front-page headline of this article read, "Separated at birth, united by chance." We too were separated from God and one another at birth, lost and thousands of miles away, like from Chicago to Miami or Chicago to China. And then we were found by grace, which was anything but chance. And now we are called to be united in God's family. *Separated at birth, united through rebirth.* Most of us here today come from various backgrounds and have been on divergent pathways. Yet, we who belong to Christ have been born anew as his children, and we are all indwelt with the same Holy Spirit and being-renewed nature. By the miracle of his grace, out of a sea of lost humanity, we're brought into fellowship with God and with each other. We must cherish our fellowship in Christ. Our joy isn't complete without it.

John writes as if he were saying that his joy will never be complete until others are gathered into the fold of God. He wants them to share the joy of delighting in God. He feels his own joy is diminished unless others share that joy with him. He's motivated by the resurrection, the Beloved Disciple who's in love with God and his children. Are we?