

Know and Love the Truth

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[0 : 00] Please take a seat. Well, it's a great pleasure to be here this morning and to be looking at the letter of 2 John with you.

And I thought that I'd begin by reading you something from The Age. It appeared in The Age on September the 16th, 2008.

The Ten Commandments, one of the most negative documents ever written. With that provocative claim posted high over two city streets, controversial cleric Francis McNabb yesterday launched a new faith for the 21st century, a faith beyond Orthodox Christianity.

Dr McNabb says Abraham is probably a concoction. Moses was a mass murderer and Jesus Christ, just a Jewish peasant, who certainly was not God.

In fact, there is no God. In the usual sense of an interventionist deity, what we strive for is a presence, both within and beyond us.

[1 : 16] Dr McNabb is a noted psychotherapist and an executive minister at St Michael's Uniting Church in the city. He said the new faith was necessary because the old faith no longer worked.

The old faith, he says, is in large sections unbelievable. We want to make the new faith more believable, realistic and helpful in terms of the way people live, he said.

That appeared in the age. And I went and looked at his website for his church and I found this quote, the real future of the Judeo-Christian path is a secular one.

Far from being the enemy of Christianity, the truly secular life is the legitimate continuation of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Hardly the hope of Jesus coming again in the flesh to judge the world. Or you can also find on his website his 10 new commandments to replace the old negative ones.

[2 : 24] And he claims that these 10 new commandments are probably what Jesus would have said if he came around today in the 21st century. I've only got two of them.

They're the first two. They give you a pretty good picture of how they all go. Believe in a good presence in your life. Call that good presence God or GD and follow that good presence so that you live life fully, which is tolerantly, collaboratively, generously and with dignity.

Number two. Believe in a God presence in your life that will lift you constantly to live harmoniously in yourself and with others, always searching for your best health and happiness.

Well, 2 John is a short but helpful book. And though it's only 13 verses long, it has a reminder that we need to hear today just as much as those who needed it when it was written almost 2,000 years ago.

And it's a message that speaks to us as to how we should deal with deceivers like McNabb and how we can avoid falling into their trap and also how we can help other Christians avoid falling into his trap.

[3 : 56] Now, the letter is written by the elder, who is probably John the disciple, and it's addressed to the elect lady and her children.

Now, who is this lady? People have made a bunch of suggestions as to who she might be, but the best answer is that when John says the elect lady, he's speaking of the church.

It's a metaphor for the church. And you'll find many references throughout the whole of Scripture that refer to God's people as a personified female, as a wife, as a bride, as a mother, as a daughter.

So there's definitely a precedence for this kind of reference to God's church as a personified female. So John 2 is not addressed to an individual, but rather it's addressed to a church.

But it's also very short, and that means sometimes it's hard to understand exactly what he's talking about, John's talking about, without looking at a group of larger books which John also wrote.

[5 : 09] John also wrote the Gospel of John, followed by the letter 1 John, which was most probably a circular letter.

So John wrote it to be sent to a variety of different churches that he might have had some sort of authority over, which dealt with a lot of the theological issues. And then 2 and 3 John, specific letters written to specific churches to deal with perhaps some of the more specific things that were touched on in 1 John.

And then also we have the book of Revelation, which John wrote about Jesus' coming again. So these books will help us to understand what's going on in 2 John.

But the big picture up front of 2 John is that it was written to warn those Christians in the church about not holding on to the truth of Jesus Christ and his coming in the flesh and our need to continue to love each other.

Truth and love. Now, after the initial greeting in the first three verses, John begins by saying that he's overjoyed that some of the members of the church are walking in the truth.

[6 : 39] It's obvious that the truth is very, very important to John. And it's probably a lack of truth that caused the letter to be written in the first place.

Let's look at verses 7 to 9 to start with. Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Be on your guard so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward.

Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ but goes beyond it does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

Now, there were people who were going out from within the church into the world and they didn't believe that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh.

[7 : 41] And this is exactly the kind of position we find ourselves in today. There are people who, like Francis McNabb, go out into the world and deny that Jesus was God-made man, that he lived a real life, that he died a real death.

They deny that God raised him from the dead to a real physical body. They deny that because of what Jesus has done, our sins have been forgiven if we put our faith in him.

People like Francis McNabb and before him Spong and before him many, many others deny God by denying Jesus.

And I think it's important to note that these deceivers are not like the people who deny God but make no claim on the Christian faith.

That is, they're not like most of our non-Christian friends or family members who are not trying to say, I'm a Christian, but God is like this or like that.

[8 : 48] Nor are they, I think, they really like the Hitchenses and Dawkins of the world who say Christianity is a total joke. No, these people, these deceivers, these are people who go out from within the church.

Look at what John says in 1 John 2, verse 18. As you have heard, the Antichrist is coming.

So now many Antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not belong to us.

For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. And then skipping down to verse 22. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

This is the Antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father and everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also.

[10 : 00] These deceivers, these Antichrists, these Antichrists, they go out from the church and when they deny Jesus, they prove that they don't have God.

And we see them everywhere. Often on the news, loved by the world, they go out from the church with a new faith and they legitimise their claims with church buildings and clerical collars and things that we associate with the church and they tell us to listen.

They tell us they've found a new way. They've rediscovered what Jesus actually meant. But it's not a new way. And the funny thing about these modern day deceivers, these modern day Antichrists, is that there's nothing new about what they say at all.

In fact, since Jesus has set up his church, people have tried to go around claiming that they know better. Evidence is this letter written 2,000 years ago that people have tried to claim they've got a new, a better, a special kind of revelation.

And John tells the church that they must be on guard against these kinds of people. For if we are not, then we may start believing them.

[11 : 26] And if we do believe them, then we will no longer be trusting in Jesus and by extension, we will no longer have God. So John, in this letter, is very concerned with the truth.

He's concerned with the truth of Jesus. He's concerned with the fact that it is through Jesus we get access to God. And he's concerned with the truth that Jesus was a real man who lived a real life and died a real death for us.

But for John, truth is not merely an academic thing. It is not merely an acknowledgement of fact. Truth is also intimately connected to our way of life.

Truth is directly connected to love. Let's look back in verses 4 to 6 of 2 John. I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth just as we have been commanded by the Father.

But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning. Let us love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandment.

[12 : 55] This is the commandment, just as you have heard it from the beginning, you must walk in it. So we know John is overjoyed that he's heard there are people in the church walking in the truth.

We know by truth he means a belief in the real person of Jesus Christ. But like I said, there's more than a mere acknowledgement of fact.

For John, a belief in Jesus Christ transforms that person into a person who loves. Let's look at 1 John 3.23.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another.

Truth is important and equally is love. But what is love? And what does it look like to love one another?

[14 : 02] Well, I think there are two sorts of love. Nice love and tough love. Nice love is where you and the person enjoy the experience.

So, for example, nice love might be when I buy Elisa flowers, she enjoys that experience, I enjoy that experience because she gets the flowers, she's happy, maybe I get a kiss or something, everyone's happy, it's easy and it's enjoyable all around for both of us.

That's nice love, the kind of love that both people enjoy. But then there is tough love. And this next example I'm going to give, I'm not judging anyone who's ever done this, so I'm talking to parents here, but imagine there's a child in a supermarket and they're chucking a tantrum.

They're screaming and they're yelling and they're pointing at the chocolate bars at the supermarket so conveniently places right at their eye level as you're waiting for the long queue to go down.

And they're yelling, I want this chocolate bar, Mum, I want it, I want it, I want it, I want it. And the parent says no. And they go even more crazy. But in the act of saying no, there's love.

[15 : 33] Because in the end you end up with, hopefully, a child who doesn't turn out to be a spoilt, selfish little brat.

And the parent ends up happy even though it might break their heart to say no because they hopefully end up one day with a child who is grateful, a child who isn't spoilt, selfish and a brat.

And now, it's okay to buy a child a chocolate bar sometimes just to shut them up. I'm not having a go at anyone who's done that but merely the illustration is that sometimes love is not easy, it's not nice.

The person receiving, the person giving may not enjoy the moment. So, what does John say love is? Well, his answer to this question starts in verse 6 and it doesn't really seem that clear on first reading.

He says, to love is to walk according to the commandment. Now, what is his commandment? Well, he says, it's the same as the commandment that they heard from the beginning.

[16 : 50] Hmm. And by beginning, what's he mean there? Well, I think he means it's the same commandment that they heard when they first became Christians. And what was that commandment?

Well, if you remember, we just read 1 John 3.23 and there we heard that we should believe in the name of Jesus and love one another. So, that's the commandment.

John says we must walk in it. By this, he means we must live according to this commandment. We must believe the truth and love one another. It means we, sorry, but that doesn't really tell us what love is.

It seems even though John says there in verse 6 and this is love, he doesn't really seem to answer the question there of what is love. However, he does go on to explain why we should love each other and I think this helps us to more fully understand what it means to love one another.

So, if you look between verses 6 and 7 there, in the original language, there's a connecting word, a word that joins those two verses together, which means it would read something like, you must walk in it because many deceivers.

[18 : 16] So, what John is saying then, I think, is something like this, we must love each other so that when the deceivers go out and they try to deceive you, they try to tell you that Jesus was just a Jewish peasant, then we will be all helping each other to believe the truth because we love each other.

The reason we need to love each other is to limit the power that those deceivers and antichrists may have over us. See, if we love each other, then not only are we looking out for each other, being nice to each other, being patient, being caring, doing all those nice kind of things of love, but we are also reminding each other of the truth, telling each other the truth, correcting each other, rebuking each other, seeing when people seem to be moving away from the risen Lord Jesus and lovingly bringing them back.

And this can be tough because sometimes people don't want to hear it. If we do this, if we correct, if we rebuke, if we love each other in this way and we do it from a way that is loving and not cynical or self-righteous, then the work of the deceivers, the work of the antichrist would be much, much harder because it is a lack of love that would allow someone to go around with uncertain beliefs about Jesus and then have them snatched up by the latest and greatest new faith.

So, does love have any limits? Well, we all know that Jesus says we should love our enemies and we definitely should.

We should pray for those who persecute us and make life difficult for us and we should do good things for people who hate us. but right here in 2 John verses 10 and 11 it says this, do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching, for to welcome them is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.

[20 : 41] when I read this I thought this sounds like it's unloving, that this sounds like we're called to limit love to these people.

What's going on here? Well, I think there's an answer and I think the first thing we need to do is understand what hospitality was like in the first century.

It was a bit different to how it works now. So now what happens is we invite someone over, we feed them, we talk about their life and they talk about our lives and then everyone goes home full and happy and sleeps very well that night.

But in those days they had a different way of operating. Basically what would happen was if you rocked up into a town in the first century you were considered to be an outsider, a stranger.

And if you were like this it meant that the law of that town didn't apply to you. So it wasn't like today where we have laws of the land that go everywhere or universal human rights declarations, it was a lot more specific.

[22 : 02] And so if you received hospitality from someone you went from stranger with no law to guest and became under the protection of that town and its laws.

And then if you were the person providing hospitality to that person you would be implying some sort of recognition of that person as being with you.

You were saying this person's with me, he's okay, she's okay. So for the Christians at this time in this church that John's writing to, to greet these deceivers, to welcome them into their house, would be to say I agree with you, I'm with you, this person's with me, I agree with them.

And that's why John's telling them not to do this. And I don't actually think this is unloving, I actually think this is more like tough love. Because not associating with them makes them realise that they're not part of the church, that we're not okay with what they're saying and that it matters to us and it ought matter to them who Jesus is.

I think for us today this kind of teaching would mean we don't want to invite Francis McNabb next week to give an exposition of the Ten Commandments. We wouldn't invite him to stand up here where I'm standing because that would be to say we agree, we want to hear what you say.

[23 : 38] So what does all this mean for us at Holy Trinity? Truth and love. Well, if you talk to someone who knows something about churches in Melbourne, especially if they know something about Anglican churches, then I don't think you'll find anyone who won't say that Holy Trinity is a solid, evangelical, truth-loving, Bible-teaching church.

And this is a good thing, a really good thing. This should be celebrated. We know who Jesus is. We know that he's died for us.

We know that the Bible gives us instructions as to how to live and become more like him. But if we want to continue to grow in our influence and especially, I think, amongst the secular world of Doncaster and beyond, then we need to remember that John links truth and love as equal factors of the Christian life.

And I think there's probably room for all of us, myself included, I'm not standing up here as the perfect one, to grow in the love side of things, both the nice and the tough.

The nice things like sharing our lives together, being open with each other, having meals together, going out after church today for lunch with people we've just met, doing all those sorts of things, but also the tougher side of love.

[25 : 17] Not letting our friends here at church, actually I think that would be, not letting our family members here at church, go around being shaky on the truth of Jesus Christ, on the truth of his coming in the flesh for our sins.

I can't really sum up this any better than John himself in 1 John 4, verses 7 to 11.

Let me read them to you. Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way. God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.

[26 : 34] I pray that this would be a place that is not only known for the way it teaches God's truth, but also a way that a church that is known for its outrageous acts of love, radical acts of nice and tough love.

For then, I think, we will see God's light shining even brighter from this church, into this community and to the world around us. But it's not enough just to love.

We must remember to hold fast to the truth of Jesus Christ coming to this world because he loved us and dying for us.

And that's our model, to live as people of love. Amen.