

# In The Know

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ]     robed in awesome majesty, those who sat at naught and sold him, pierced and nailed him to the tree, wailing deeply, even they shall the true Messiah see.

Our God grant that in the chaos and confusion of our times, we may see the true Messiah, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. The text which I'm anxious you should have before you is taken from the fifth chapter of the first epistle of John, and the text itself is the very last verse, which says, Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Yes. The big problem in the world that John sees as he writes this letter and draws it to a conclusion, the big problem is sin.

Now, that may not come as a surprise to you, but by and large, we've managed almost fairly successfully to ignore it. So it's nice to be reminded by John that it remains the problem.

[ 1 : 41 ]     It's what, and I quoted this last week from Eugene Peterson in his translation of this epistle. So he talks about sin as a major disruption of God's order.

So it's not from drinking too much or carousing too much. Those are only simply symptoms of it.

The problem arises because in sin there is a major disruption of God's order, and you and I and our world suffer the consequence of that disruption.

Now, let me make a... I drove through Oak Ridge parking lot this morning on my way to church just to pay my respects to the true temple of our consumer society.

But I was glad to see that their parking lot, though a lot fuller than ours, was still not altogether full before 10 o'clock.

[ 2 : 56 ]     It's strange because Oak Ridge is full of stores. Now, I would take it that stores are places where you store things.

That would seem logical to me that at a store you store things. But judging by the size of the province or the sun on Saturday, Friday, most of the stores don't want to store anything any longer than they have to.

So they want you to store it, and they want you to pay for the privilege of storing the junk which they can no longer find room to keep. And so the great festival of Boxing Day has been invented and developed.

And so you can, you know, perhaps over lunch, you can contemplate the symbolic significance of Boxing Day to our society, where stores are no longer stores.

But more seriously than that, one of the other problems is when churches are no longer churches. Places for the worship of God.

[ 4 : 12 ]     And for this, I'm indebted to the rector who showed me an article in the Globe and Mail on Friday by Michael Volpe, all about Harris Dale and Shaughnessy. Did you all see it?

Very interesting. He shares his memories, which include singing in the choir at St. John's Shaughnessy.

It's a story which I find terribly depressing. And that's by the time I finished it.

I sincerely hope there is another dimension to the story that even a skilled writer like Michael Volpe can't articulate. You know, anybody, I mean, we can all commiserate with him.

I mean, those of you who are old enough to have seen this happen, but if you go back to the place where you were brought up, it's changed. And it's impossible that it has changed for the better. And so we contemplate how much worse it is now than when the really good people lived there and lived it the way they should live 50 years ago.

[ 5 : 20 ] Well, he talked about Angus Drive and McKechnie School and McGee High School and Cubs and Scouts and Brownies and Guides and the Masonic Order and finding in the church the resources for some of his social needs, which at that time seems to have been mainly girlfriends.

That was one thing the church provided for him. Another was the opportunity to join in the aesthetics of singing in the choir.

And so apparently he has suffered what many choir boys suffer from, and that is agnosticism. And then, but there is that kind of, there's also the connection that his father's ashes lie in the Garden of Remembrance.

And then he was provided with a secondhand story about St. John's, which said that St. John's had been taken over by a liturgist, I presume.

This is the rector who's done all this to me, but who is, I mean, who with his henchmen has turned this into, let me see how he puts it here, he's of the school of the, if our Lord were here today, she would be into rap.

[ 6 : 55 ] And that's how he summed up the present ministry of St. John's, which is not particularly surprising, but it's, I wish I'd started when I first came to this parish, keeping a list of all the things people think go on at St. John's, mainly people who've never been here to find out.

And it's a wonderful list of things, and amazing, some of them fabulous beyond your wildest dreams, and some of them cynical beyond your wildest dreams.

But it's all from people who, I guess, haven't been to find out what's going on here. Well, the concern that I have about that is, that I've heard that over and over and over again, hundreds of times I've heard it.

I used to go to St. John's. I used to sing in the choir. I used to go to the Saturday night dances. My forebear's ashes are in the garden.

And that's it. As far as St. John's is concerned, that's the only significant connection that remains. It's a very sad thing.

[ 8 : 24 ] I mean, I recognize it, but it does raise the problem as whether the church is being the church if hundreds and hundreds of people give that same testimony to their involvement in this parish over the past 70 years.

It's sobering, but I want you to be sober because I want you to think seriously about this passage that we're coming to. I wanted to add, by way of further introduction, that I was enormously encouraged by the Queen's message to the Commonwealth.

which she said includes a quarter of the people on the globe. And until further notice, still includes the aspiring Republic of Australia.

She said, she said, she said, she quoted John's gospel, chapter 1, verse 10, and said that we all knew this.

I pray God she's right. But she said, he was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

[ 9 : 52 ] That strange reality that the one by whom the world is made does not recognize the one that made it. And then she went on, and for our comfort, quoted again from John 1, 12, and said, but to all who received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name.

Well, that brings us to the beginning of the text, doesn't it? If you look at it, you'll see it there. Anyone born of God, anyone who is a child of God, anyone who having believed in him has become a child of God.

Now, the issue in 1 John is that it takes, it takes this problem of sin very seriously. The thing that is described when it says he was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world didn't know him.

You see, that's where sin takes effect. That, that sort of gap between the fact that the world was made by him, the world didn't know him. That's the consequence of sin.

It's the consequence of sin in your life and mine. We, we are made in his image, and we don't know the one in whose image we're made.

[ 11 : 29 ] That's, that's what sin is. And, that's the, the problem that, that, that we have to face.

Now, what, there are two kinds of sin, it looks like, in, if you look at the whole of, of this epistle, there are two kinds of sin.

There is a continuity of sin that goes on, and on, and on, and on, in unbroken continuity through a person's life. It just keeps going, and it compounds itself, and compounds itself, and compounds itself, but nothing breaks it.

Well, that's the, that's the first kind of, of sin. The second kind of sin is sin which suffers serious discontinuity.

and, the, the discontinuity is because an interruption has been made in the process of sin.

[ 12 : 39 ] And, that interruption takes place primarily with the death of Christ on the cross.

and that's what we sang about in that hymn just now. The interruption of the, of the continuity of sin and death takes place with the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The continuity of that, the continuity of sin in our lives takes place when we are born again of God's Holy Spirit.

in our Christian lives when we sin the continuity of that sin takes place when, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive them and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and that we're to be careful not to think that we are without sin or that we haven't sinned but in our sin to accept the discontinuity of those sins by the interruption of God's grace in forgiving us and by the advocacy of Jesus Christ who is at the right hand of the Father and who has made a propitiation for our sins so that he can claim for us the forgiveness which he wants us to have and that our relationship might be that the continuity of sin in our lives might be broken and the relationship to God might be restored.

Well, if you then look at the text you begin to see how this works out. it works out because it says anyone born of God does not continue to sin.

[ 14 : 47 ] That's verse 18 and that's the New International Version translation of it that anyone born of God does not continue to sin and the consequence of that is that you look in the same verse the one who was born of God keeps him safe.

In other words, having been born of God the process of sin having been interrupted then the one who is born of God who is Jesus Christ keeps you safe from the power and consequence of that sin and the evil one does not touch him.

In other words, you are kept safe and protected from the influence of the evil one. Well, that's why you see this major event in our lives and this is what the heart of the church is about is that this disruption of the continuity of sin should take place in a life which can be described as church membership which involves social fulfillment aesthetic fulfillment a place of belonging that needs to be broken by the reality of the new birth in which God in his sovereign power interrupts in our lives the process of sin.

Well, and it goes on and says in verse 19 we know we know that we are the children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

You don't have to know that. That just happens to be a fact that the world is under the control of the evil one. But you can know that you are the children of God John says.

[ 17 : 02 ] Now how do you do that? Well, if you go back in this passage to I think it's verse 10 he who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself that what God has done in Christ on the cross is confirmed in our hearts by the testimony of God through the person of the Holy Spirit that we know we are the children of God and that the meaning of our life relates to the reality of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

I would like that to be very simple to you and yet I feel that I've messed it up and not explained it clearly enough but just look at it again once where it says we know that we are the children of God that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

That's the pattern of our world death is the end result of life as we understand it in the world. The unbroken continuity of sin is part of the world in which we live.

The whole world is under that control but we know that we are the children of God and that that knowing is because God has it's a kind of subjective awareness because of the witness of God's Holy Spirit in our hearts.

That is a source of knowing. That's how you come to know is that God by his Holy Spirit bears witness to the person of Jesus Christ in your heart and when you question your heart you will find that that is the inescapable conviction which God has placed there so that you relate subjectively within yourself to the objective reality of what God has done in Christ.

[ 19 : 06 ] Now that's that's we know that we are the children of God that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come that again is God's witness to Christ in our hearts by the Spirit that's how we know that the Son of God has come that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God the Christ of God we know that he's come and he has given us understanding.

Now that's a different kind of knowing. There is the knowing which comes from the witness of the Holy Spirit in your heart there is the knowing that comes as you experience the reality of that in the world so that you know in your heart by the witness of the Holy Spirit but God has also given us understanding or as a gift the apprehension or perception of the truth which is in Jesus Christ so that you become aware of it.

Listen to the verse we know that the Son of God has come and has given us that knowledge which is acquired through experience so that we know him who is true so that your growing awareness is that Jesus Christ is the truth of God.

There is the witness of God to the person of Christ in history there is the witness of God to the Holy Spirit in your heart and then there is your witness as you go on in that knowledge of knowing that in the chaos and confusion of the world there is truth there is authentic reality in the person of Jesus Christ and in our world we are desperately in search of something which is authentic which is genuine which is true and it's very hard to find and the reason that it's very hard to find is the unbroken continuity of sin in our world the reality that the whole world is under the control of the evil one and he is the counterfeit and he is the imposter and he is the one that deceives and he is the one that lies and it's hard to break through that to make contact with the genuine the authentic and the true and John says the way you do it is that the continuity of sin is broken the reality of forgiveness is conveyed you are kept by God from being touched by the evil one so that you can experience the genuine the authentic the true that that's what's to be at the heart of your life now of course the difficulty with all this is wonderfully summarized for us when at the end of this passage he makes what seems like a total non sequitur people didn't used to know what that means but now it's in the comics so it's available to everybody a total non sequitur and that is little children keep yourselves from idols which seems like a non sequitur except that it says in this world where the lie and the counterfeit and the deception is all around us and is totally pervasive in our world can you reach through it to touch reality can you break through the idolatry in which you live and so he concludes this by saying little children keep yourselves from idols one scholar suggests that that may be the last statement in the whole of scripture that was ever written down the whole of the bible ends with

I mean this is a possibility scholars debate these things and simple minded preachers pick up the fragments of their battles and think maybe this has some value maybe it does I mean maybe it is possible that this is the last word in the whole of scripture and this is what it says keep yourselves from idols little children now look at it closely and you will see it's translated dear children because you are known and you are loved you are children because you are born again to a new life and you have a lot to learn in the continuum of sin you may be very advanced remarkably sophisticated highly knowledgeable deeply experienced but in the new birth and the witness of the Holy Spirit you are just a child so dear and beloved children the truth has touched you but the truth is inseparable from love so I can't just say children

[ 24 : 59 ] I have got to say John says little children dear children whom I love in the truth and then it goes on to say keep yourselves from idols that is guard yourselves and it's it's I mean it's it's remarkable because as I've just read to you it says that God will keep you safe now it says now you keep yourself safe now this is where one of the great misunderstandings of Christianity comes from of the Christian religion most people think that when the direction is go north and you go south and end up at the north pole by mistake you say praise God you know but what is man is when God says go north because that's where I want you to go and that's where I will enable you to go then you've got to make every effort you can to go the way he has told you to and not to think that if you went in the other direction it would be a marvelous praise of the grace of God that you ended up where he wanted you to end up which is what most people and a few think that was an unwarranted slam at a congregation that I'm sure doesn't deserve but I'm only projecting myself into your situation when I say that and speaking to myself but so he says dear children because you are born again to a new life and you have a lot to learn keep yourself guard yourself from idols now our world and here

I'm being cynical again but only to try and communicate to you something our world considers it to be the kind of zenith of human freedom to choose your own idol and to worship him with all your heart that's the great freedom of our world you can choose your own idol and worship him in the way you like and and John ends this passage by saying no keep yourselves from idols stay in touch with that which is authentic with that which is true with that which is genuine don't mess around with counterfeits with deception with that kind of unreality which the whole world is involved in a conspiracy of exalting and worshipping that's why you're to keep yourselves from idols that's why perhaps the bible ends with those that you are to stay in touch with the flesh and blood reality of Jesus

Christ who died on the cross who has ascended to heaven and whom God has borne witness to through his word and confirm that witness in your heart so that at the very center of your life you have that which is authentic that which is true that which is genuine your relationship to Jesus Christ my relationship to Jesus Christ and it's that which keeps us from accepting the idols that's what God's purpose is is to keep us from the deception of sin the continuity of sin sin which relates to death and the lie and to keep us in touch with the genuine authentic reality of the truth that God has revealed in Jesus

Christ and that you see is right at the heart of your life and mind it is love and it is true and it is genuine and it is not in any way idolatrous it's not a fantasy a counterfeit that is the reality and in relationship to that we are to live our lives and in doing that dear children keep yourselves from violence amen we'll sing our operatory hymn which is a story in song of the breaking in of this wonderful discontinuity in our continuing state the story of Christmas hymn number 223 please stand in him to continuevale

Let the children rise as we get on their own.

[ 30 : 59 ] The angel of the glorious, that for me, my Re■ciel.

Hear God, sing You, I lie to wife and Mummy. But I am still a trickle after renewal singing, we bod overdrive, whom we j around this day Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ.

[ 33 : 56 ] We affirm with St. Luke that Jesus, God incarnate, was indeed born in Bethlehem, and that he was placed in a feeding cross. We confess in this 20th century what Pascal confessed in the 17th century, that not only do we only know God through Jesus Christ, we only know life and death through Jesus Christ.

Apart from Jesus Christ, we cannot know the meaning of our life or our death, of God or of ourselves. Lord, we pray that in the years to come, the children of this parish would retain their excitement for Christmas and their joy in Jesus.

We pray also for grown children who have wandered from the faith, that they will once again see the light of the world. We acknowledge that you are our God of peace, and we pray that countries now at war will find peace in the coming year.

And we pray especially for the peacemakers. We give thanks for the spread of the good news of Jesus. And here in Vancouver, we ask that your Holy Spirit would be present with Alistair McGrath as he leads a mission at UBC during the first week of January.

Jesus, we pray for the sick in our congregation. We ask that your strong presence be with Elliot, Tim, Evelyn, and Theo.

[ 35 : 38 ] We pray for three-year-old Brett who has a brain tumor. We pray for those who have recently undergone surgery.

For Ted, Tom, and others who have cancer. We pray for Kathy, Ethel, and Bert.

And we pray for David and Betty on the death of David's mother. Give each the measure of faith that they need to know the reality of your goodness and your love for them.

We pray for our outward lives in the coming year, in our relationships within families, with friends and strangers, with employers and employees.

We ask that our lives will exhibit the fruits of your Holy Spirit. And inwardly, we ask that your Holy Spirit make us conscious of our sin, which includes our idols, and our constant need for your forgiveness.

[ 36 : 56 ] We pray that our love for Jesus will increase, and that the Holy Spirit will often cause our minds to focus on the teachings of Jesus.

As we look to the new year, Jesus, we worship you and confess that you are Lord. Amen. Good morning, everybody.

On this beautiful day following Christmas, welcome to St. John's. I suspect some of you here may be visiting from other places, visiting family and friends, and we very warmly welcome you here.

This coming week being the last week of the year, I would just like to remind you that if there are any outstanding pledge monies to come in, that they come to the office this week. And also, if you are planning to pledge for 1994, we would very much appreciate those cards by the end of this week.

One of the really lovely ways to end the old year and start the new year is to come to the watch night service on New Year's Eve. And that begins at 11.30 Friday evening, so I would very much encourage you to come if you can.

[ 38 : 19 ] A little bit of happy news. Many of you will remember Tama O'Rourke, who was our youth director at St. John's for several years. She became engaged on Christmas Eve, and the wedding will take place in the summer.

Her fiancé's name is Craig and they live in Toronto. We are having a coffee hour following the service in the hall, so please do come and have some refreshments with us following the service.

Thank you. Thanks, Margaret. I published the Bands of Marriage for Pamela Nalen and Frank Gunderman, Heather Wickstrom and Eric Skarsgård.

Let's bow our heads and pray for these couples as they marry. Our Father, we commend to you these two couples. We think, too, of Tama and Craig, and we ask for them all, that they may keep themselves from idols and that you may keep them in the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For we ask in his name. Amen. Now we're going to stand and sing our final hymn, number 238 in the Blue Hymnbook, 238.

[ 39 : 24 ] Amen. Let's bow our heads and sing!

Now we'll sing among you the wonderful God. Let'sandi He kaire The main■■ generally O my God, and the Lord is with us, I will show you today, and the Lord is with us.

O praise you, O Lord, and the Lord is with us, O Lord, and the Lord is with us, Raff ■■■ f moeten■■p nehme re Ag ■■■■ de ch■t uso th■ Let your carry re Hahju da writing voice In the Lord's hand of the■■, O Lord Hel q da raffi how the chassis thy dut On dell'oho ge en serb die Wahl shang bao tu de gh There ■■■■ chorus full of re Fall Amen.

Bow our heads.

Now may the peace of God which came in the person of Jesus Christ keep us from idols. And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us always.

[ 42 : 12 ] Amen. Amen.