

In Truth And Love

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[0 : 00] Our God, we are met together in obedience to your command. We are confronted in the scriptures with the person of your Son, Jesus Christ, and our hearts have tried to imagine the reality in our world to which you are bringing us, where Jesus Christ will be acknowledged King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And Father, our obedience to him is what you are calling us to by your word and through your spirit. Help us each to understand in the circumstances of our own very particular lives what that obedience means.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We've been following through a series of sermons built on the subject of the Catechism, and that part of the Catechism which I want you to look at today is found beginning on page 552 in your prayer book, and the passage of scripture which we're going to focus on is the second letter of John, which you'll find in your prayer books, or find in your pew. We can't talk about pew Bibles because you have chairs this morning, but the blue Bibles that you'll find in the chairs. I know that some of you were expecting that we would be in the church this morning, and so was I at this time last week, but I think I can assure you that we will be there next Sunday, and that's the beginning of a new church year, so it's an appropriate time for our first service in the new church.

And it's probably appropriate at this Sunday, being the last Sunday of the church year, that we look at what the church is.

[2 : 26] And of course the church is not that building over there, it's this congregation gathered here. And this comes out in the letter, which is called the second epistle of John, and the church is described as an elect lady and her children.

And each congregation is related to other congregations as a sister with her children, so that we are spoken of in that way.

And John is writing a letter to one of the churches, which undoubtedly was founded by the ministry of Paul, but now Paul has been put to death.

And this congregation to which this letter is addressed is considered to be one of the churches in the province of Asia.

And John, who by this time was probably in Ephesus, writes to that church, and he writes this very gracious letter.

[3 : 45] This second epistle of John is considered to be a kind of praesi form, and if you want the content of it, you have to turn to the first epistle of John, which is really an expansion of and development of the teachings of this second epistle.

So you have a letter addressed to a congregation, and we are a congregation, and we seek some word from God to guide and direct us at this time in our history.

And so the letter begins, the elder. Now, the word elder is the presbyter. And the presbyter is the root word from which modern English derives the word priest.

And so when you are the priest of the parish, it means that you are the presbyter, and it implies that either spiritually or physically or both, you are rather elderly.

And so it's the picture of the elder or the presbyter to the congregation who is the elect lady, the members of the congregation who are her children, whom I love in the truth.

[5 : 18] Now, if you go on to read the rest of the letter, and I trust you will, you will find that love and truth always go together. When Pilate said that, when he asked that question in the gospel that was read for us this morning, he said, what is truth?

And this epistle answers that question by saying, truth is love. But what is love? Love is truth.

Well, then what is truth? Well, truth is love. And on we can go. It goes around and around and around. Now, in our society and in our world, we have been able to divorce the two and to think that we can know what love is when we don't acknowledge the truth, or we can know the truth when we don't find ourselves loving.

And John writes to this Christian congregation in Asia to say, the two are quite inseparable. You can't define truth apart from love.

You can't love apart from truth. The two define each other. Now, you see, what Jesus had come to do was that he had come to establish a new community.

[6 : 51] There are other communities, communities that, according to blood, all of us are the descendants of, all of us belong to the society of, all of us have been initiated into.

All these things make for groupings of people. But Jesus had come to put together an entirely different kind of community.

It was a community which had a relationship one to another on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ. It was the community of those who, by their faith in Jesus Christ, became the community of the born again.

That is, we all have no difficulty claiming citizenship in this world, but what God has called us to is citizenship in a spiritual kingdom over which Christ rules.

And each of us, in our hearts, reverence Christ as Lord. That's the thing we are to come to. Now, as he goes on, look at what happens.

[8 : 09] He says in verse 3, grace and mercy and peace will be with us from God the Father, from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, so that all these qualities of grace and mercy and peace are present with us because Jesus Christ is present with us.

They are, it is from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, who comes to demonstrate to us the indivisible union of truth and love.

And John goes on to say in the letter, I rejoice greatly to find some of your children following the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father.

I'm impressed by the word some, that he's very realistic, and that he is aware of the fact that some are not.

And he goes on to say in part why some of them are not. And the great mystery of any congregation is trying to determine those who are following the truth and those who are not.

[9 : 28] And we can't absolutely identify that, but we can say that such, such in fact exists, that there are those who follow the truth.

And John writing to this church says he's glad that some of them are. And then he says to the lady in verse five, which is the congregation, I beg you lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have from the beginning that we love one another.

You see, what he is saying is that God's purpose from the very beginning has never been anything else but love, that he would teach us the truth which is love and the love which is truth, and that would form the basis of the community which is the kingdom of God.

There it would be. And it would be for everybody. It would be in a world where we are very divided ethnically, we're very divided culturally, we're very divided linguistically, we're very divided politically, we're very divided economically, that this whole world would come to acknowledge Jesus as Christ and find in the reality of truth and love a oneness which could transcend any barrier, ethnic, linguistic, or economical, political, any barrier between people would be transcended by Christ coming among us.

And this was, as it says here, this was the Father's command from the beginning. Now, I have come to the conclusion that we would be a lot better as a congregation if we lived in a totally pagan culture.

[11 : 33] culture, but because we live in a culture which is hard to identify and hard to distinguish ourselves from, we don't really understand what it means to be a Christian.

But what we are as a community is a community of people who live in response to the command that God has given from the beginning to love one another.

And that, that's the community we are. Now, you know that some people are easier to love than others. And, the motivation for love can be very confused.

But that, somehow, the test for this love is that it is an acknowledgement of truth and it is indivisible from love.

You can't talk about truth without talking about relationships. You can't talk about relationships having any meaning unless there is truth in those relationships.

[12:35] And that's what he says. So, that's what the church is. The church is the corporate response to the command of God from the beginning which he gave in creation, which he gave in the Ten Commandments, which he gave in the community of Israel, which he gave in the kingship of David, which he gave in the words of the prophets, which he gave in the wisdom of the Psalms and Proverbs.

That's the command. And that command has come to total articulation in the teaching, life, and death of Jesus Christ.

So, that's what the church is. Now, turn to page 552 and see how in the prayer book and see how in a pragmatic way we've tried to work that out in the design and structure of the church.

Page 552 at the bottom of the page, and if you will be patient with me, I will take you through this and you will respond, I hope, appropriately.

What is the church? What do we say about the church in the Nicene Creed?

[14:02] Why is it called one? And why is it called holy? Because the Holy Spirit comes in, sanctifying all his members and the body of the Spirit.

And why is it called Catholic? Because it is universal and holds for all time, for all the nations and for all people, and all the truth as it is in Jesus Christ.

It was the same yesterday, today, and the prayer. And why is it called apostolic? Because it is the seed of the nation of Christ and the gospel and the peace of God and the fellowship.

What is the work of the church in the world? The work of the church in the world is all and God and all of them and worship is to do and make known to all men the gospel of Jesus Christ and to make all men to God and all of them.

How did our Lord provide for the life and work of the church? Our Lord sent his Holy Spirit upon the church and upon his apostles.

[15:19] What authority did Christ give to his apostles in the church? He gave the authority to preach the word and minister the disciples to rule the heirs of the gospel of the church and the gospel of the church.

What orders of ministers have been in the church from the apostles' time? The church of the apostles' and the apostles. And what is the work of a bishop in the church of God?

To the chief master of God, to preach the gospel and to our of the faith, to rest and earn and to the living, all of the example of the blessed apostles.

And what is the work of a presbyter or priest? To minister to the people and to despair of the nation, to be in the of the worship of God and to teach the word, to that God has a sovereign and full of communion and to deny his salvation and blessing and God's name.

What's the work of a deacon? To assist the vision of a priest and divine service and of the administration to move on to God. What is your work as a lay member of the church of God?

[16:36] To take my heart into worship and deliver his counsel according to this grace of God to the living and to pray and for the good of the service of his need.

Why ought you to read God's holy word, the Bible? Because it's just the Lord who takes his help from the man and how we may come to know him.

and my salvation through our religious Christ and the fellowship of his church. What does the church teach about the Bible? The Bible reports the word of God as I was living in Israel and to this church as I'm in the times and in the Bible as I'm in it.

And I am in the God of the church and to serve for my salvation and I see the word of God and the word of God. where then is the word of God to be found in all its fullness?

Jesus Christ the Holy Son who was in the man of the cross and the cross of the mission. What is the vocation or calling of a Christian in this world?

[17:44] To follow Christ in the earth and the spirit and the spirit and the spirit and the spirit and the spirit and the spirit and the spirit and the spirit. So you see there's some things there that you can debate but what he's talking about is a congregation of people and how they are organized and how they are structured and this is a new community and this community is based on faith in Jesus Christ and this community is held together by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and this community is a community that has determined to be obedient to the command of God.

The command of God is love in truth. So John goes on to describe what happens in a church in verse 7.

Many deceivers have gone out into the world men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

So what you get is before you had believers and unbelievers but now you have believers and then you generate within the life of a congregation deceivers so that you have deceivers and believers in the life of a congregation and the way you detect the difference between them doctrinally is whether they acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

In other words it's the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ that is the heart of the belief of the church.

[19 : 30] That is the truth and it is that incarnation that demonstrates to us the reality of love. God so John the elder writes to this particular congregation and says look to yourselves that you may not lose what you have worked for.

Friends of ours went over to Main Island last week or some people there and found that their whole house had been trashed and everything was gone that they owned. So you can come to a congregation and find that it has been trashed and everything of value has been taken away.

The form and structure is still there but the reward for which the congregation were looking and which God the Father was to provide had been trashed by the deceivers who had come in and destroyed the life of the congregation.

And so he says this is how it happens in verse 9. Anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.

So that the doctrine of Christ is essential. Now that's translated as the teaching of Christ in some others but it's twofold because it's the teaching about Christ in the first instance that he is God come in the flesh and it's the teaching of Christ through the gospels that forms the life of the congregation.

[21 : 03] Now I must tell you that we have a wonderful men's Bible study on Wednesday mornings and last Wednesday morning we gathered and were confronted by the by the record of the revelation by the record of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the last chapter of Mark.

Now if you take a group of men on their way to work on a Wednesday morning filled with the demands and pressures and tensions and stresses of modern life and you suddenly raise the subject of the resurrection of Jesus Christ it's hard work it's hard to move from the centrality of our of the things that our mind is occupied with to try and relate in a new way to the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and it was a lovely morning because that's what we had to do and in some measure I think that's what happened and of course that's why we're here this morning because we bring the worries and the anxieties and the fears and the stresses of our own lives the difficulties and hardships of our own lives and we bring it together in order that we may affirm the reality of the

God who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ our minds drift away and away and away we are deceived so that we lose the centrality of this thing and we need to be brought back to it and so John John writes about the church and says anybody who goes further than the teachings of Christ that is that they consider that this we accept Jesus Christ but we really know better than the gospel and they go beyond the gospel to find their teaching and John says no you remain you abide in you walk in Christ and you are taught consistently by Christ and about Christ and that gives you the place where you abide and that gives the measure by which you walk out your life and then it gives a verse which is exudes a wonderful inhospitable nature you are not to be hospitable everybody thought that Christians are supposed to be hospitable well here's an instance in which you're not to be hospitable and he makes it very clear if anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine that doesn't mean that he's an unbeliever it means that he assumes that he is a believer but he's lost touch with the reality of

God who has in Christ come in the flesh if anyone comes who does not bring this doctrine don't invite him home to lunch don't give him any greetings because he is the one that will ransack your spiritual household don't let this person into your house now I don't know whether that applies to the sun or the province or other things that come into our house but the danger seems to be done when it does come into our house when division about and uncertainty about and deception about the nature and character of Christ comes to the place where we live we are in danger and John tells us not to invite that person into our house and that's basically why you have to be subjected Sunday by

Sunday to preaching from the scriptures when there are so many brilliant people in our city who could talk in a very interesting way about an amazing range of subjects which would edify you and illuminate you and educate you in ways that would be wonderful but the business we have together as a congregation is to come under the obedience to the command of God which has been given to us in Jesus Christ who has come among us in the flesh and who is the one who says where we live where we abide and how we walk and then he says as he concludes this is impossible I would rather not use paper and ink well the Christian church owes an enormous debt to paper and ink in communicating from one generation to another and from one century to another but it has an even better way of doing it on the basis of that paper and ink and that is that you gather face to face and talk one with another we need desperately to talk to one another to share with one another

[26 : 18] I'm in a state of total indecision this morning because last week I formed you into groups of six and some thought it was the best thing that others thought it was a travesty of the whole of Anglican tradition through 2000 years and so I'm going to leave it to the coffee hour but I the thing is that our fear of it is I think something we need to pay attention to because it means that basically we are fearful of one another and we are perhaps too self centered and we need very much to come together and to discover the reality of truth and love in our relationships with one another when we meet as

John recommends face to face we need that on a consistent basis meeting face to face and sharing the reality of the truth that has been made known to us in Jesus Christ and the love which is inseparable from the discovery of that truth we sing the offertory hymn number 168 they alleluia
Not Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[30 : 01] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Amen.