

The Politics Of Exclusions

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[0 : 00] hearts by your word, illumine as well the experiences of our lives from day to day and the pattern and structure of the communities in which we live.

Help us by your word to be very much more aware of the Lord Jesus.

Into whose presence by your Holy Spirit we come. We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. The passage this morning is from 1 John chapter 4 verses 1 to 6.

And as you've been told that's from page 223 in the back of your pew Bible. I wasn't able to be here last Sunday because I was in Victoria I guess.

But I did hear the sermon on tape and it began rather dramatically with the rector lying in a seizure from the front of the church here with all the doctors in the congregation gathered around him to see whether he was going to survive.

[1 : 20] So I'm grateful that he looked so well this morning. My experience in coming at this passage in preparation for talking to you about it is first that there's not very much there that you haven't already heard.

And therefore what will I say? Then the second realization was that what is there is so out of touch with the world in which we live that I'm not sure you want to hear it anyway.

But then in due process as as you read it and study it and work at it and chew at it and think about it you suddenly find that it's the whole of the revelation of God reduced to six chapters six verses and and that you have to put that in front of people in 20 minutes.

However can it be done? Well as your experience has shown it can't be. But look at it this way because it's a it's a it's an amazing thing.

The first thing I want you to see is the world as John saw it the world in which in which this community of Christians to whom he was writing the world in which they lived and if you see any parallels between their world and your world then I think the passage may begin to take hold of you.

[3 : 10] But if you look at it you see this you see that that first there is a world it is some kind of coherent structure it hangs together and people come to know what their place and part in it is and it gives identity to people it helps you to know who you are in relationship to the world in which you live you have to make your mark in that world you have to be able to relate to that world that world has certain economies and various structures that you are obviously a part of and that's that's the world that's spoken of here in verse 1 when it talks about the world in verse 3 where it talks about the world and in verse 4 where it talks about the world and in verse 5 where it talks about the world so just as you glance through the passage notice all those references to the world and as you notice them be very much aware of the fact that that this world is for us it's totally coherent it makes sense we understand it we know how to relate to it we're part of it we derive much of our life from it we are in the world and

I think that that is an inescapable fact we may have a kind of an escapist mentality that makes us think we're not but the reality is that we are there now in the world there are those who are known for purposes of this passage at least as false prophets prophets and the false prophets are called in Eugene Peterson's book lying preachers so you begin to see that it is a mixed kind of world it's there's a whole lot of spirits in this world that's the way it's described here it's a very spiritual world as the world in which we live is very spiritual the difference between this passage and our world is that in our world all spirits are of equal value of equal significance and of equal irrelevance but for them it was a very spiritual world the false prophets were the preachers of that world and they had infiltrated the whole of the world then this world knew that it had a common enemy they knew what would bring the order and structure of this world grinding to a halt would be the

Christ so their power structures and their control and their authority and their lifestyle was dependent upon the world proceeding the way it was without interference so they knew that they had to provide for their world a kind of Christ figure and they it was this person who was as they regarded him who was the one around whom they could preserve the sanctity as it were of their world was a Christ figure and so they thought that way they thought of a Christ figure it's not unlike the woman whom Jesus spoke to at the well when she said to him we know that when the Christ comes when the

Messiah comes then everything will be right and the world in which we live has a dream that Christ will come and put everything right in the meantime we're moving towards it we're not there and but when we get there then that will be fine well that was that was the world that these people lived in it was it was a world that the people who lived in it understood they responded to it they had experience of it and that was what I guess I'm struggling to tell you is that it was powerful it was attractive it was hopeful it was meaningful it had it had a certain prestige to it it was it was a world that they understood and could relate to and the people who were the power people in the world were very much aware that they had to speak of a

Christ who would come but in the meantime the power belonged to them and they could infinitely put off the coming of this Christ who would take over from them and so they were able like the people whom you read about in the gospels who were given charge over this man's property and they knew that as long as the man who owned it stayed away they could pretend it was theirs and so within the power structure of the world the people could pretend that that world belonged to them so long as nobody came along to challenge that power they were taught by the various spirits the spirits they had a legion of false prophets who went out and kept the idea going and kept people loyal and talked down people who disagreed it was in that sense a spiritual community and the origin of those spirits was in the world and it was identified in this passage as the false prophets so that you could get an idea going and you could exhaust the potential of that idea and then you could find another idea and get it going and exhaust the potential of that and then try another idea and all these spiritual ideas were all equally valid from their point of view until something quite drastic happened now

[10:59] I gotta explain to you I'm still talking about the world you may think I'm talking about the church and that just shows your confusion but I'm not I but what I am doing and I think what this passage is doing for us is to say to you as it said to the people to whom this letter was written this is what you already know you don't need to be taught this because if you go back to chapter 3 and verse 24 where it says this we know that he abides in us by the spirit which he has given us there is another spirit which taught which teaches us something different and what this what this passage does for you is to help you test the spirits or to know with which spirit you are in touch and that's what that's how the passage begins don't believe every spirit because into this monolithic structure of the world that I have described there comes a spirit of divisiveness and you've got to begin to sort out well is this a lying spirit or is this true you have to say well now how do you tell well you know that our culture and our society has said oh they're all true and you're not allowed to distinguish between them but these people were required to distinguish between them it said test the spirit now who are these people you have the picture of the world and then you have in this passage a picture of a group of people and they are first described by

St. John as beloved beloved and that brings you back I hope you were here last week to hear Jim Packer tell you what beloved means these were the agapoi the people who were loved with that peculiar love which Jim described to you last week as being a love which I think the way he put it was that which seeks to make great the person who is loved so when John writes this letter and says beloved he's saying you are the people whom I seek to make great and he says that's what I desire for you and of course that's what you desire for one another to make you great now mind you I told you about the world which is huge and powerful and attractive and significant to people and then there's this little cluster of people whom

John writes to and says but it's you that I want to make great you are the beloved and you have this you have my desire to make you great you have God's desire to make you great you have among you a desire to make one another great as you love each other with this special kind of love which is well that's what happens now what he tells this community is that they live in in a very kind of mixed kind of world and that even among themselves there may be quite a few different spirits now the way you test that is you call a vestry media and find out what's going on here anyway the

different spirits are there some are of the world and some are of God and it's hard to tell which are which all the people that have them and are giving expression to them are on have no doubt about it that it's from God but the people that hear them maybe have some questions to ask as to whether it's from God and so that's the way they hear one another so this is the community of the beloved they live it's a mixed community within itself that's why I think the Anglican church is very wise to have a whole lot of confused people theologically all joining together to worship not because that's necessarily a good thing in itself but it's better than thinking that you are all together when you're not so I mean that's you see the difference they they recognize they are recognized as the children of God because they're not identified any longer in terms of the world to which they belong they are they are identified in terms of the kingdom to which they belong in the world they may be as many of you appear to be successful wealthy wise powerful and I would talk to you as sophisticated adults of the city of Vancouver but John says my little children because he sees the community as children in their father's kingdom not as sophisticated elitists in the world so he calls them children and the thing that he says about them is that there is at work in them if you look at the passage it's right there there is something going on among them which is ultimately greater than the thing that is going on in the world and you can you can see that if you look at verse four you see word says he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world so that somehow in this little community of the loved the children of the kingdom something greater is happening than the thing that is happening in the world and the the the difficulty is that's very hard to imagine it's hard to imagine that this little company of people in the ancient world or as this company of people in our modern sophisticated city there is something more significant going on here among you than there is in the world outside of you looks like all the action is out there all the retreat from the action is in here what this says is that it's quite the opposite the greater thing is happening here than is happening there now the bind that we're in culturally in our society now our multicultural politically correct society is comes right in the first verse where it says do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from

[19:24] God our society says believe every spirit and don't test them because everybody has the right to believe what they want to believe and the spiritual forces of one group are just as good as the spiritual forces of another and how do you know that you have something that we don't have and what makes you think that you have something that we don't have and all that goes on all the time in our world but there is an objective reality to the spirit which is in this group which is different to the objective reality of the spirit that is in the world he says the way you identify it is this that the world has its Christ who is a sometimes somewhere somehow kind of reality which will someday come to our world and in the meantime we're looking after things this is what I want you to do that's how our world works but the other community is very different they say that sometimes somewhere somehow somebody has come and it's

Jesus and that's power that is at work in you by his Holy Spirit he is at work in you and that's why this passage the fulcrum of this passage the crisis at the heart of it is when it says every spirit which confesses that Jesus is the Christ and that he has come in the flesh is of God you see it's not whether your spirit is stronger or more powerful than my spirit or anything like that it's who is Jesus and the only thing we know about Jesus that this passage makes very clear is that the little community is a community because they have by the work of the Holy Spirit experienced the living presence of Jesus among them so that they can't say well it's not that we're right and you're wrong it's that we can't escape from the encounter that we've had with Jesus and even though it contradicts the whole world in which we live which is looking for the Christ we can't say well let's go on looking in greater earnestness and with greater sincerity we can't say that because we know that Jesus is the Christ he is the one whom God has sent that's why of course we stand up in the midst of every service and say I believe that in Jesus Christ conceived by the

Holy Spirit born of the Virgin Mary suffered under Pontius Pilate crucified dead buried on the third day risen again ascended into heaven because we're saying in outward words at least that he is at the center what John says is that not only do we say these in words but we are caught by the encounter with the living Lord Jesus and we cannot but believe that this is the truth of God that truth which God has made known to us in Jesus Christ so he says what you have to do now is go back into your world and try the spirits test them to see how they relate to Jesus do they say that he is

the Christ come in the flesh or do they say no well what the world has had to do is to say Jesus is the spoiler he he has to be he has to be got rid of the whole of our world and the whole of our way of life and the whole of our understanding of ourselves has to do with our taking control and our running our world and to say that the kingdom has come in Jesus is not acceptable and so he says that's that's the way it is and the way you have to relate to that is by testing the spirits to see what they think about Jesus even as I say that to you I am almost horrified by the terrible reality of it that's the message of the

[24 : 50] New Testament that's the thing which we as a church hold to that that's the center of our being is the living Lord Jesus to whom we relate by the inward working by the inward working which same spirit being at work in us is accomplishing that which is according to not the world's ambitions but according to the purpose and plan of God and that's that's where we're caught you see because the world hates Jesus it has to for practical reasons because if he's right they're wrong he's the he's the excluded one he doesn't fit the world has a kind of unified system that all seems to fit together beautifully and if everybody will behave in a correct politically correct manner the whole thing will work until

Jesus comes along and then somehow he doesn't belong they have to reject him and put him outside they have to exclude him and you have to suffer some measure of exclusion from the world if you have put your faith in Jesus too that's what John tells them he says the Holy Spirit has taught you this that verse 24 by this we know that he abides in us by the spirit which he's given us and we're not arguing the validity of our spiritual experience we're arguing that Jesus has abides in us Jesus who has come in the flesh Jesus who is the Christ of God he doesn't fit easily into our lives just as he doesn't fit easily into the world in which we live but there he is the passage ends by saying whoever knows

God listens to us and he who is not of God has not listened to us see it's just that you can't tell somebody something that they don't know the only way they could know it is if God the Holy Spirit had told them if God the Holy Spirit had told them then they would listen and if God has not told them then they won't listen and if they won't listen to that what they will listen to is the world because they are of the world and what they say is of the world and the world listens to them that's one closed communication loop that loop is broken when God speaks to us by his Holy Spirit concerning the person of Jesus we listen by this we know John ends up with this terrific statement we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error we don't endlessly debate we know that there is truth and there is error there is a truth and there is a lie and all that we know comes from one source or the other and the only way you can tell what the source is is to see whether in that there is an acceptance or rejection of Jesus that's what John is saying not only is he saying it to that congregation he's saying to them you will only know this if

God the Holy Spirit has told you you will only know this if Jesus is a reality in your life that you have learned to acknowledge by the power that is working in you which is greater than the power that is working in the world that's it's all it says I mean it says a thousand things more that's what it says believe beloved do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are of God many lying creatures have gone out into the world by this you know the spirit of God that every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of

[30 : 21] God this is the spirit of antichrist it's the world's Christ we call the antichrist one who cannot tolerate Jesus this is the spirit of antichrist of which you heard that it was coming and now it is in the world children we are of God and have overcome them for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world they are of the world therefore what they say is of the world and the world listens to we are of God whoever knows God listens to us and he who is not of God does not listen to the spirit of truth and the spirit of error it's an amazing thing let's pray our God we ask that by your Holy Spirit you will confirm those things which are revealed to us in your word and confirmed in us by your spirit so that we are in contradiction of so much that we are that we are compelled to confess that

Jesus who has come in the flesh who has been born lived and died on a cross this Jesus despised and excluded and rejected is Christ of God us to come to this in each of our lives we ask in his name Amen you