

Our passage today comes from the first epistle of John. We will start reading a little before the assigned text, at verse 6, to help give us better context for the lesson. Let us hear God's word to us this day from 1 John chapter 5 verses 6-13:

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. ⁷ There are three that testify:^[a] ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.

⁹If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son.

¹⁰Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son. ¹¹And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

This is the word of God for the people of God...thanks be to God.

We are all giving witness to something. Our lives are a walking, talking, living testimony to what matters most to us. The question is what is it that is being testified to by the way we live our lives?

This is the final Sunday of Eastertide, next week we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit with Pentecost. It feels appropriate that we are ending this Eastertide with a reading from 1 John, an epistle that is focused largely on eternal life, as we look back now almost 40 days to Easter and consider the significance of the resurrected Jesus.

The writer of 1 John is writing to a formed faith community, these are people who profess faith in Jesus, and are likely coming under persecution for their beliefs and being challenged in their understanding of who Jesus was, fully human and fully God. This is why I began the reading with verse 6 today. In verses 6-8 there is a testimony given about Jesus' humanity and his divinity. He came by water and blood the writer says, as human and as divine. While we have come to accept Jesus' duality it was not that straightforward in the first century.

New Testament scholar Nijay Gupta reminds us, "In order to appreciate just how controversial this would be in the first century, we must understand two things. Firstly, the anticipated Jewish "messiah" was expected to be a triumphal figure, an invincible superhero for his people. How could such a man be "bested" by his enemies? Secondly, it made a huge difference *how* Jesus-the-messiah died. If he died nobly in battle, at least he would be remembered for his bravery. But crucifixion was the absolute *worst* way to die. The Romans did not invent crucifixion, but they perfected its effects — it was the single most powerful way to obliterate someone's dignity and honor. No wonder Jews found it to be a stumbling block and scandal to think of a crucified messiah (1 Corinthians 1:23).¹

¹ Gupta, Nijay, workingpreacher.com, May 17, 2015

Because this understanding was so crucial to their belief, the writer emphatically expresses his testimony, reiterating what was witnessed to in the gospel of John that it was both water and blood pouring from Jesus' side as he was pierced by the spear of the soldier. Once the writer has made his point about the dual nature of Jesus he shifts to focus on the importance of believers to live a life of witness in the present day.

The writer starts with a hypothesis: if we receive human testimony, then the testimony of God is even greater. And then ends with a hypothesis: If you believe in the name of Jesus, then you will have eternal life. The writer wants to ensure that the readers, the community of believers gathered in the name of Jesus, understands they have eternal life in the here and now, it is not something they must wait for, or anticipate. It is a state of being already available to them. This frame of mind goes beyond a singular event of the crucifixion or even the resurrection and requires accountability for believers to live a different way of life, one that gives witness to faith in Jesus as the Son of God and the testimony to God's power and love in the world.

Last week we heard from Jesus an invitation to abide in his love so that we might know complete joy and bear fruit for the kingdom of God. Today, we are reminded of how important it is to give witness to, to testify on behalf of our beliefs, for our action to follow suit with what we claim in belief. So much of our focus in the modern church has been an emphasis on Jesus' resurrection and its implication on our individual lives. Many have used Jesus' resurrection as a get out of jail free card, or a way to claim that belief in the resurrection of Jesus is enough for an eternal life that comes after death but in

this Eastertide our attention is drawn not to a belief in one moment or in what can be expected in life after death, we are instead drawn to giving witness to our belief in who Jesus. Our belief that his life mattered, in that he loved and cared for people in ways that were so outside the norm to the point that it caused him to be sought after and killed, and that his death mattered, in that it showed us that God understands the suffering of discipleship, and that his resurrection mattered, in that it promises us that death does not conquer and life is restored by the power of our creator. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is an entire re-ordering of events and the world and it requires we respond with our lives too.

We are called to give witness to our belief so that others will experience the same gift of eternal life we have now. The idea that eternal life is something we wait for and happens only after death does not fit the pattern of John. In John 10:10 eternal life is abundant life lived here and now, and in John 11:25-26 it is life that death cannot destroy.²

For most of us we have been taught either directly or indirectly that our spiritual lives should be separated from our body. And this way of thinking has unfortunately led us to experience Jesus in a disembodied way. It has allowed us to separate ourselves from the image of God we each bear, it has allowed us to deny that we each carry Christ within us. And, in part I believe it allows us to deny or avoid the duality of Jesus himself. Both fully human and fully divine.

² Johnson, Elisabeth, Workingpreacher.com May 16, 2021

However, recognizing that Christ is carried within each of us, and offers us eternal life now allows us to give witness more fully to the work of God in our lives. In the acceptance of this embodiment of God we are then able to give witness to what it is God is doing in and through us. It is when we accept that we are the bearers of Christ for the world that we are able to love the world more wholly, and see that we are in fact living eternal life now.

Scholar Elisabeth Johnson says, “The author of 1 John asserts that believers can **know** that they have passed from death to life because they love one another (1 John 3:14). Love is evidence for everything that matters in the Johannine literature: that we are children of God, that we abide in Christ, that we are his disciples, that we have eternal life.³

It is by our acceptance of the love of Christ within us that we in turn love others, that we in turn give witness to the joy available to us in this life through belief in the Son of God. Giving witness to our faith is both simple and radical. It is lived out in so many different ways across this globe.

This week I saw an image of people gathered together around a long table in the middle of a street. They were smiling, eating, drinking, sharing stories. They were doing this in the middle of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, a place where many families are under threat of being run out of their homes with nowhere to go. As I looked at the picture I thought how can they be so joyful? How can they be celebrating when there is so much

³ Ibid.

persecution and fear swirling around? It's because both are possible: joy and fear are not mutually exclusive. Joy and pain are not mutually exclusive. They are living a fully embodied experience. They are giving witness to their faith, breaking their Ramadan fast, in joy and celebration. They are experiencing eternal life in the here and now.

Over the past year many in this congregation many of you have invested hours upon hours to learn, pray, and discern God's leading around issues of inequality in our society. It has been a time of choosing challenging conversations and examining long held understandings of self and faith to experience eternal life in the here and now, to give witness to Christ living in us and in others in a time when so much about pandemic life could have called us inward, to focus only on our own well-being.

That is the thing about giving witness, about recognizing that we are the image bearers of God, that we are the ones called to act in accordance with Jesus so that eternal life is experienced here and now. Sometimes eternal life means choosing joy when the world would have us despair, sometimes eternal life means showing love where it's easier to hate, sometimes eternal life means living into community that is complicated, difficult, and challenging when it's easier to walk away. Eternal life isn't easy street, it isn't the get out of jail free card we sometimes hope for, it's an obligation and responsibility, a calling and a gift, to give witness to the works of God in us and in the world. Eternal life is a recognition that as we strive to give witness to God's kingdom we may face hardships but those hardships will not and do not negate the abundant life available to us now.

As the psalmist reminds us we are like trees near a stream bearing fruit for God as we give witness to the resurrection of Jesus as we live our lives to be a reflection of his love, loving one another, embodying his spirit.

Friends, we are promised eternal life, our belief in Jesus, our knowing that Christ dwells within each of us, turns that promise into an invitation. If we believe in the testimony of Jesus, then we will give witness to his life, we will love as he loves, we will honor God in others. We are part of the story here and now, the life we have is our very witness to our creator. What is it that our lives are giving witness to? Is it love? Compassion? Kindness? If not, why? How will others know Jesus through us? As people of faith gathered in Jesus' name we are invited to bear witness to his love for the world. Let it be so!