

Old Testament

Isaiah 66:1-6

Thus says the LORD:

“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?

² All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the LORD.

But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.

³ “He who slaughters an ox is like one who kills a man;
he who sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog's neck;
he who presents a grain offering, like one who offers pig's blood;
he who makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol.

These have chosen their own ways,
and their soul delights in their abominations;

⁴ I also will choose harsh treatment for them
and bring their fears upon them,
because when I called, no one answered,
when I spoke, they did not listen;
but they did what was evil in my eyes
and chose that in which I did not delight.”

⁵ Hear the word of the LORD,
you who tremble at his word:
“Your brothers who hate you
and cast you out for my name's sake
have said, ‘Let the LORD be glorified,
that we may see your joy’;
but it is they who shall be put to shame.

⁶ “The sound of an uproar from the city!
A sound from the temple!
The sound of the LORD,
rendering recompense to his enemies!

New Testament

1 John 1:1-2:2

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to

us—³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Walking in the Light

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Christ Our Advocate

2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Sermon

I believe it when I see it

Last Sunday, we said with Christians throughout the world: 'The Lord is risen, He is risen indeed!'

I have heard it said: Christians are weird. They believe in a man who was dead but then got alive again.

Cynicism. Denial. Unbelief from those who can or choose to think only in a way that makes sense in a logical way. What is happening in the world is easily used as proof; as justification for cynicism. Where is God....?

Don't get drawn into cynicism, unbelief or criticism of God. Stand firm. That is what the apostle John, in our New Testament passage, tells us. John urges us to continue to believe in the God who came down, in His Son. We hear words from John, one of the disciples, who witnessed what Jesus had done while He was on earth. From that position, the position of an eyewitness, John writes a letter to a congregation to strengthen the bond with them. But that strengthening will not happen without first strengthening the bond between the congregation and God.

*For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness. (Psalm33:4)*

That is what needs to register with the congregation to which John writes. It needs to register with all congregations who hear and read that letter.

God's faithfulness is unshakable. It is a biblical fact of the past, present and future. Belief in that biblical reality is of crucial importance now and in the future.

We are looking at a letter that John writes to a congregation, but we also have the gospel of John, in which he tells the story of Jesus' life on earth.

John stresses that he was there with Jesus. He was physically present when Jesus was crucified. John looked upon that cross. It is that sensory experience that is emphasized in how John begins the letter, as we heard

That which was from the beginning (1 John 1:1) which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—(1 John 1:1)

John puts emphasis on his sensory participation in Jesus' life on earth. What he says is: I witnessed God's incarnation by hearing Jesus' voice with my own ears; by seeing what Jesus did and what was done to Him, with my own eyes; by touching Him, with my own hands ! He was real. John so strongly presents himself as eyewitness in order to reassure, to convince the congregation of the truth of who Jesus is and what He did.

It was and is God's initiative to bind Himself to us in perfect love, through His Son. God's love for us enables us to love. We love with the love God first loved us. Held by Him within His love, we stand in His light.

Now, you can see something that is white and see something that is black. You see even better what is white and what is black when the two are put together, next to each other, as the contrast between the two comes out.

Like an artist, John uses contrasts in his works, in his writings. The contrast between light and darkness is what John plays with, when He proclaims Jesus Christ as the Son of God,

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5)

God is light. Jesus said it. John speaks of that light. Many of us may be familiar with the words as we find them in John's gospel,

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:5)

Here in John's letter, John consistently builds on his use of the contrast between light and darkness. He does so by placing sin and darkness over against light and forgiveness. Then we hear a few times the word 'if'.

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth (1 John 1:6)

The consequence of letting God bind Himself to us, through Jesus Christ, is that we walk in His light. What follows from that is that our lives are shaped by that light. What follows from that is the bond with others. Fellowship.

However 'if'....more 'ifs' and contrasts follow.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 6-10)

Jesus Christ, who cleansed our sins, bridges the gap between God and us. Yet, despite the bridging of that gap, we need to begin our worship with the prayer of confession. For, believing in Christ, do we reflect that belief in our daily lives...? We fail to do so, too often. We are not consistent with what we believe and say.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves

¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar

The verbs 'to lie', 'deceive' and the noun 'liar', they are words that belong to the darkness. John uses these strong words as a means to demonstrate the darkness of sins vs the light of the forgiveness through Jesus.

For despite our unfaithfulness to God, God remains faithful to us, through Jesus our Advocate. Not remaining true to God, we are still held close to God through His Son. We are still held within the light of God's forgiveness, through the cross.

How can we minimise being drawn into the darkness of the things that go against God?

By having reverence for God.

Reverence for God makes humble and that will shape interaction with others. Interaction with others as God has it. Humility towards God allows for room for the other.

*But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2)*

Reverence for God is not the same as fear, as we know it. Fear as we know it disables. Reverence for God does the opposite: it enables; it empowers. It opens the eyes for the other; it brings about fellowship. It enables to have empathy for those who cross your path.

We believe on the basis of the proclamation of the Good News as we have it in the Bible. Yet, often we are like Thomas.

After Jesus' resurrection He appeared to His disciples. However, one of them, Thomas, was not there. When the disciples told him that they had seen Jesus, he did not believe them.

'I believe it, when I see it'. Does that not sound familiar?

Then Jesus appeared again, so that Thomas would now see Him; could feel Jesus' hands with the holes left by the nails with which He had been nailed to the cross.

Then, Thomas believed, and said: 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20:28)

Jesus replied:,

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (John 20:29)

Amen