

For the Joy of It
1 John 1:1-2:2
April 7, 2024
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Over the winter we read the story of Jesus as told by the gospel of John. This week we're turning to the letter of 1 John. It comes out of the same community as the gospel of John and it grapples with what all those stories about Jesus mean in our daily lives. They come to the conclusion that Jesus has shown us that God *is* love. That part's in chapter 4 though, so we'll get to it. Today we start at the beginning.

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1 We announce to you what existed from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have seen and our hands handled, about the word of life. **2** The life was revealed, and we have seen, and we testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. **3** What we have seen and heard, we also announce it to you so that you can have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. **4** We are writing these things so that our joy can be complete.

5 This is the message that we have heard from him and announce to you: "God is light and there is no darkness in him at all." **6** If we claim, "We have fellowship with him," and live in the darkness, we are lying and do not act truthfully. **7** But if we live in the light in the same way as he is in the light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin. **8** If we claim, "We don't have any sin," we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. **9** But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we've done wrong. **10** If we claim, "We have never sinned," we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

2 My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you don't sin. But if you do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. **2** He is God's way of dealing with our sins, not only ours but the sins of the whole world.

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This little letter packs a lot into just a few words. We could linger for weeks on any one verse and keep finding more. We won't, though.

Let's start with verse 4, why they're writing. So that their joy will be complete. I love that. They're not trying to convince, or persuade, or evangelize. They're sharing for the joy of it.

A friend of mine who has a 4 year old was telling me the other week about explaining the Easter story to them. My friend said this was the first year they really got it. When she was done telling the story their kiddo's eyes lit up and they looked at their mom and asked, "Do you have a phone?" "Yes..." said my friend, not really sure where this was going. "Go get it!" her child said, "We have to call people and tell them!"

That's the spirit of joy that's in this letter.

Look at what they want to announce, "what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what our hands have handled."

In other words, all the theology that's going to follow isn't just theory or logic or philosophy. It comes from real experiences they've had. The conclusion they end up drawing from their experiences is that God is love.

They've come to believe that our deepest calling and the goal of our lives is to wake up to that love, live within it, let it motivate everything we do.

Which if you try to do that for, oh, just an hour or so, you quickly discover how difficult it is.

I think that's why this letter almost immediately gets into questions of sin and fault and forgiveness.

Love sounds great. But when it's lived out... well, mistakes get made, feelings get hurt. This letter was not written by just one guy in a quiet room. It was written by community that knows: everyone screws up. The only really problematic folks are the ones who don't think they're ever wrong. Everyone screws up. And everyone is forgiven. The whole world, they say.

They trust that because they have experienced it. They've experienced the love that is God.

They don't tell us what their experiences were—just that they had them. Remember, the people writing this letter weren't alive when Jesus was. They're followers like us, who came after. And they had physical, tangible, beautiful experiences of love and ultimate reality. Like we do.

Take a minute and think, what are experiences you've had of God, of love, of joy?

A moment of profound connection with a best friend? Being at the bedside with a loved one as they died? A moment standing on top of a mountain? Being forgiven or reconciled?

If we take seriously the idea that in Jesus we see God's abundant, overflowing love, that God *is* love, then those experiences of love should be the foundation of our perspective on the world, the source of our theology.

They aren't just pretty moments of distraction from what really matters and what's really real. They are the point.

Yes, sin is profoundly real. We are all broken in some way. We all hurt others, earth, ourselves. Our Calvinist ancestors called it total depravity, which is pretty intense, but honestly, some days, looking at the world and what we are capable of doing to one another, I'm not sure it's an exaggeration. We can call it the human propensity to mess things up. But however we name it, we can't shy away from it. We have to be honest about it.

It's why we have a time of confession almost every week in worship. It's not to beat up on ourselves or make us feel ashamed. It's about honesty. We hurt people—in big and small ways and ways we don't even notice, all the time.

But, says Genesis, it's not the first word about us humans. The very first word God said over us humans was, "Good." Just like the rest of creation: very good.

And, says the community of John, through their experiences of God's love, they've realized our sin is not the last word about us. The most true thing, the deepest reality is love.

Trust that, scripture says, above all else. Share it. Share it just for the joy of it.

- Sarah W. Wiles, 2024