

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR APRIL 7 & 8, 2024**

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed and our hands have touched regarding the Word of Life— ² the life appeared, and we have seen it. We testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We are proclaiming what we have seen and heard also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write these things to you so that our joy may be complete.

⁵ This is the message we heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him but still walk in darkness, we are lying and do not put the truth into practice. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, just as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, 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 out to be a liar, and his Word is not in us.

My children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin. If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.

(1 John 1:1-2:2 EHV)

Once upon a time, a certain town grew up at the foot of a mountain range. The town was famous for its clear mountain stream that provided the people with pure water. The source of the stream was a spring carefully tended by a strange and quiet forest dweller. Regularly he cleaned out the debris and foreign matter so the spring flowed pure and cold. Mill wheels sparkled in the sunlight. Flower gardens flourished. Swans swam in the millpond.

Then things changed. The business minded town council wanted to save money by eliminating the job of the forest ranger that tended the mountain spring. They proposed building a reservoir to hold the water like the other towns. The water that came from the reservoir was never the same. It became warm and sluggish. Trout no longer jumped in the stream. The wheel of the millpond became green with unwanted algae. Some of the people became sick from drinking the water.

In desperation the good people of the town decided to go back to the way things were. They voted to tear down the reservoir that held the stale water and rehire the mountain ranger to keep the spring. Amazing. It did not take long for the water to come back to its pristine condition. Once again it danced and sparkled as it flowed over the rocks. Trout were seen feeding at dusk. Swans returned to raise their young.

The Apostle John saw something similar happen to the message of the gospel during his later years of life on this earth. False teachers polluted the pure teaching about Jesus. Some were saying that Jesus was not God from all eternity, and that he did not die for our sin on the cross and bodily rise from the dead.

To be sure, they spoke in glowing terms about Jesus as a great light who could help you be all that you can be. But the whole idea of a blood-stained body that won our salvation for us coupled with a bodily resurrection from the dead was totally repugnant to these people who claimed a higher knowledge and a better way.

They created their own reservoir of higher knowledge that blended teachings from the Bible with teachings from Eastern religions. The result was a devil's concoction that poisoned the pure Word of God and removed Jesus as the source of their salvation. I don't have to remind you that history is repeating itself before our very eyes. Let's look at these words of John and find **Proof of Life**.

John pleads with us to look again at Jesus as the pure source of our salvation. ***“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed and our hands have touched regarding the Word of Life.”*** (v. 1) Jesus was from the beginning. He is God from all eternity. ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*** (John 1:1) That’s how the gospel of John begins. This Lord and God from all eternity became fully human. The human body of Jesus is not something to be despised. It is to be loved and cherished as the source of salvation.

You can almost see the tears of joy in John as he says, ***“which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed and our hands have touched”*** (v. 1) John was there beneath the cross when Jesus died. John was there in the tomb and saw the grave clothes left behind. John was there when Jesus appeared suddenly and said, ***“Peace be with you...See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side.”*** (John 20:26b,27a) John ate food with the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

He says in our text, ***“The life appeared, and we have seen it. We testify and proclaim to you the eternal life.”*** (v. 2a) There is a reason John pleads with people to look at the physical body of Jesus as the source of their salvation. He wanted his dear children to have fellowship with the Father and the Son that their joy might be complete. ***“Our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. We write these things to you so that our joy may be complete.”*** (vv. 3b,4a)

The night before he died Jesus prayed that he might see the glory that he had with his Father from all eternity. ***“Now, Father, glorify me at your own side with the glory I had at your side before the world existed.”*** (John 17:5) Then Jesus prayed that his disciples and everyone who believes in him might share in that glory. ***“I am praying not only for them, but also for those who believe in me through their message. May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you.”*** (John 17: 20,21a) If we are going to have fellowship with Jesus and the Father or be one with Jesus and the Father, we need a pure source of salvation, not one that tries to combine things I do with what Christ has done for me. When I add what I do or think or feel, that’s death, not life.

What John was dealing with at his time were false teachers called Gnostics. This was the equivalent of today’s “New age” threat to the early church. Here are some of their teachings:

- No incarnation, virgin birth, death, resurrection of Christ
- Human Jesus and divine Christ two different entities
- All matter evil
- Only mind and spirit pure, thus, God is good because God is spirit
- Thus, since human bodies only temporary (and evil!), didn’t matter how one lived
- Salvation is escape from the body by way of special knowledge “gnosis”
- Bible insufficient as source of spiritual knowledge

They absolutely could not stand the thought that Jesus was Lord and God from all eternity and became one of us with flesh and bones, or that he paid for sin with his human body that was nailed to the cross. We have certain elements of this thinking still with us today in the self-help movement that leads people to look into themselves.

For the false Gnostic teachers at the time of John, Jesus was like this orange I am holding my hand. When I eat this orange, I dispose of the peeling and eat the good part inside. That is how they saw the body of Jesus, as something that the Son of God occupied for a time and then discarded. They loathed the beautiful wounds that mark our salvation that Jesus kept on his body when he rose from the dead. How beautiful are words of Colossians that tell us, ***“But now Christ reconciled you in his body of flesh through death, in order to present you holy, blameless, and faultless before him.”*** (Colossians 1:22) That’s about as anti-Gnostic as you can get: a flesh and blood, human and divine Jesus, crucified and risen again.

Proof of the truth of Scripture, proof of life in Jesus, can be found all throughout God’s Word. The night of his resurrection Jesus told his disciples, ***“Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as***

you see that I have.” (Luke 24:39) And John reflects on that here: ***“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed and our hands have touched.”*** (v. 1)

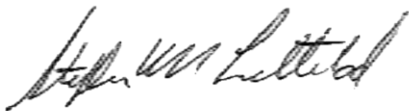
If Jesus is the only pure source of my salvation and my peace with God, then I want to treasure this source. I don’t want to add anything I do to what he has done for me. John reminds us that God is light, not the false teachers who claim to have a better way or higher knowledge. ***“This is the message we heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light. In him there is no darkness at all.”*** (v. 5)

God is light. He has spoken to us in his Word and his word is bright, like the noonday sun. According to John, if we have fellowship with God, we will want to continue to walk in the light where God makes things crystal clear to us. He says, ***“If we walk in the light, just as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.”*** (v. 7) When it comes to being sure my sins are forgiven, then I don’t want to be groping in the darkness and searching for human solutions to my problem of sin. I want to cling to the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. God is light. People who walk in the light and have fellowship with God believe very strongly that the little word “all” means “all.”

The false teachers at John’s time did not see a need for the blood of Jesus to cleanse them from their sin, because they had minimized sin and its consequences in their lives. This is happening today, too. John reminds us: ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*** (v. 8) On the other hand, ***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** (v. 9)

Imagine going to the doctor for a spot on your skin. The doctor checks it out and it is a cancerous growth that needs to be removed immediately. If I say to myself, “No, I don’t want to have the growth removed, I will put a Band Aid over it and it will go away,” I am in serious trouble. When we come together for worship we don’t minimize sin or try to hide it, we confess it. We join in confessing together as we did this morning. We constantly find ourselves praying along with the tax collector, ***“God, be merciful to me, a sinner”*** (Luke 18:13) or we say with David, ***“I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me.”*** (Psalm 51:3 NIV)

Such confession leads me to not look for the champion not in myself, but to look for the champion in Jesus. As John encourages us, ***“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.”*** (2:2) Not only for ours, but for the sins of the whole world? Yes, the whole world! Which includes me and you. Proof of life – it’s found in Jesus, the pure source of forgiveness and life. Cling to it. Treasure it. Continued to be amazed by it. As John writes, ***“Our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. We write these things to you so that our joy may be complete.”*** (vv. 3b,4)



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