

Sermon – May 16, 2021
“Faith in writings of John”

I write this message with excitement and joy looking forward to June 6.

As you all know, June 6th is a very important date in our American history, as D Day occurred 77 years ago to help defend our freedoms. But I would like view June 6, of this year, as our generations is date of hope, anticipation, and renewal of active and in person church services. For this day is also an important date for church history, as we reopen again following the pandemic we all have experienced.

May God bless us today and on that day as He has blessed us through this awful pandemic.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

How many people listening to this message had enough confidence that the church will reopen up following the Covid pandemic?

If you did, did you know when that would happen??

Are you sitting there saying, I knew we would open again soon.

So when was is the SOON that you are thinking?

Do you have enough confidence knowing when it will probably happen.

But is really like having FAITH? Is Confidence and Faith the same thing??

No it not so whatever you are thinking, HOLD THAT THOUGHT.

This Sunday we have two (2) readings both of which are writings of John.

Verses from John chapter 17, our Gospel today, and verses from 1 John, which is our 2nd reading or the epistle today.

There are very few Sundays when we have two readings from what appears to be the same writer. Or is it the same writer?

Theologians seem to debate this point.

In knowing the theme of these writings, we should examine several things to give us CONFIDENCE when it says, THERE IS THAT WORD again CONFIDENCE, so who is doing the writing of First John?

The Gospel of John is estimated to have been written toward the end of the 2nd century AD.

The information I have says that The book of 1 John is estimated to have been written somewhat earlier in the that same century, when the Gospel of John was written.

The writings may have overlapped so the style seems somewhat similar when it talks of the character or personality of Christ.

The major difference is that the Gospel of John talks of Jesus last days and resurrection.

The other books of John do not, but do talk about Jesus as our savior.

The writings of First John seem to be letters that two attorneys are writing when they talk of the “evidence” and the “testimony” of Christ as the Son of God.

Only the Gospel of John talks about the events that occurred specifically to give a time line to prove their point.

Both of the John's writings, begin in similar fashions.

In the Gospel of John, verse 1 begins by saying, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him and not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

The first chapter of 1 John uses similar language as the gospel of John: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and revealed to us...We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

In the next section of Chapter 1 of First John, it refers as God as a God of light, as in the same way as the Gospel of John.

In chapter 2, there are some verses that are different than any other in the New Testament.

At this point in Chapter 2, it refers to words that will be used and described as a “New Commandment”, but it's not the “Greatest Commandment”.

It's not the commandment that says love your neighbor as yourself.

Another important point to be made about the life in Judea at this time.

After Jesus crucifixion, in Judea and other parts of the world, the Apostles were spreading the message of the Good News of Jesus the Christ.

Unfortunately, at that time, many people were Agnostic in their beliefs which made them question Jesus as their savior.

Notice I didn't use the word that they were Agnostic BELIEVERS as Agnostics were unbelievers to start with.

Even today, I think that many people now have too many other choices on where they get their information of the news that made them essentially AGNOSTICS.

In chapter 2, verses 12-14 of John 1 it goes onto tell its listeners,

“I am writing to, little children, because your sins are forgiven on account of His name.

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one.

I write to you, children, because you know the father.

I write to you fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”

This is very different language to be used in scripture.

In some ways, it doesn't fit considering the other writings of the New Testament.

So, why am I telling you all of these details??

I am giving you these examples to help encourage you to read the Bible and read it with some Critical thinking so you can “struggle” with the text and you will be able see it with another “pair of glasses”.

I know this will help you will grow in your Christian faith, and not you Christian confidence, as I point out before.

Of the books of John, only the Gospel of John talks of the events leading up to Jesus crucifixion.

First John doesn't talk about events in Jesus life, it only talks about theology to help people to believe in Jesus as their Christ.

The Gospel of John's major message is the crucifixion story where John told what he knew of Jesus at his crucifixion and resurrection.

There is a story I want to tell you that could be part of the gospel of John's crucifixion and resurrection story.

When a car hit me after going through a red light, it affected all the lives of my loved ones, I had a number of people visit me, so they told me who visited me, not that I knew that was happening since I was unconscious,

but there was one person that visited me a number of times to support my loved ones.

That person was the Bishop of the Metropolitan NY Synod, Bishop Stephen Bouman.

I got to know him quite well as I was the Chairperson of Metro NY Diaconate Council which had responsibility of the deacons of our synod.

When I went to meetings at the Synod offices in NYC as there was no Zoom meetings at that time, I would usually arrive a little early to get everything organized before the meeting.

When I arrived, I would always check to see if Bishop Bouman was in his office.

If he was, I would stop by just to “say hello” to him and talk for a bit.

We would even talk some baseball as I am a Met fan, and he is a Yankee fan.

After my accident, with much reluctance I resigned my position for no other reason than I would have to drive to NYC for meetings plus all of the work that was involved.

In 2008, he left the Metro NY Synod for a position at the ELCA Hq for a position.

I had seen him in about 3 years after my accident. One day, I got a phone call from his office to invite me to his final service at St. Peters in Manhattan.

His secretary called me to tell me that he wanted me to represent the entire diaconate at this

service. I was asked to vest for the service along with 20 or so other clergy attending.

There was no other deacon in this last service. I was overwhelmed to receive this invitation as I viewed it as a once in a lifetime opportunity to do this.

There was clergy from every major faith from the city he had become friends with to attend this his final service.

Even the highest ranking Roman Catholic clergy were there too.

When the service was about to start, Bishop Stephen was working his way to the start of the line that will process to start the service.

When he went by me, it was like he was looking for me.

As he passed me, he stopped and we hugged each other until someone broke us so they could begin the service. I will never forget that moment.

After the service, they had a receiving line of people who wanted to wish Bishop Stephen their best and to say goodbye.

Of course, I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to say goodbye and say thank you for all he did for me and for Nancy.

There were so many people there that it took me about 10-15 minutes in line to finally get to Bishop Stephen.

While in line, I was thinking...What I am going to say to him when I finally get to him?

He is the Bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod.

When I got to Bishop Stephen, I thanked him for all of his support to my loved ones and all of his visits to see me.

I then told him, I felt like Peter, the Apostle, from the gospel of John (from chapter 13).

I told the Bishop that when he came to see me and my family, I felt like the Apostle Peter when He told Jesus he doesn't want his feet washed by Jesus.

But Peter changed his words when he told Jesus, to wash not only his feet but also his hands and his head.

I was so humbled that the Bishop had visited ME in that time of my hurting and healing.

I was in a coma for 10 days. So I didn't know he was even there but my family did..Thank God.

But A Yankee fan praying for a Met fan...really??

Being a Met fan, I prayed often for the Mets to win, but never the Yankees. Sorry Yankee fans.

Not just once did he come to visit me, but a number of times.

With his extremely busy schedule, Nancy told me he was “regular” visitor.

For I work in HIS SERVICE, not the other way around.

I was just a deacon from Poughkeepsie.

But he made me feel important every time he was there.

Our faith was lifted every time he stopped to pray for me and my family.

That is how your faith gets renewed and lifted up by the presence with the prayers.

All of those meetings I attended in NYC, I used one meeting to all our advantage,

Once the date for our 150th anniversary was set, I spoke to his secretary about getting on

Bishop Stephen's calendar to have him come to First for our 150th anniversary service.

Everyone knew he was very busy, but his secretary didn't hesitate a bit scheduling the time that was several months ahead.

Great timing I keep telling myself since I used one of the Diaconate meetings to get him scheduled for his attendance before our celebration, and fortunately was the service was after my accident.

I think God was looking after us in helping me with the timing of all of this.

After the service, I saw a print of some art of Jesus washing Peter's feet.

I had to get it...for me and for Bishop Bouman.

So I did...I framed it and sent one of them to the Bishop Stephen with a letter.

I had a chance to thank Bishop Stephen for all of he did.

The one I kept reminded me of all that had happened.

The one I kept, I gave to First Lutheran when we moved.

It's more appropriate to be here than not.

It's hanging in the fellowship downstairs from where I am preaching from now.

Every time I see it will remind me, not of the accident and the pain,
but the healing and the friendship of the Bishop that I will remember.
I am also reminded of my many friends at First. How could I not.
We can make Faith live in us by remembering all that God does for us.
For Faith reminds us of many things God does for us in our lives.

Faith will always keep us centered in all we believe in and do.
May you always find faith in the risen Christ to help remind you of all the good in your life.
And all the good Jesus has done for you.
May God bless you in each aspect of your life to help keep you centered in
faith of the risen Christ.
May you have Peace always.... Amen