

Declaring the Life That Was Revealed

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Sort of feels like we've already experienced the the main event today. When we do baptisms, it's kind of this big mountaintop experience. A big emotional high, a spiritual high. And after that kind of thing, we could certainly echo the words of the Psalmist. I read Psalm one thirty three at the start of our worship gathering. It starts out how very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity. It's such a such a true and beautiful Psalm for us to have today and I love that the lectionary gave us that Psalm.

If you don't know the lectionary, it's a collection of scriptural texts that are arranged four per week over the course of three years, you get through most of the Bible if you study the lectionary. We don't use it all the time but we have been using it since July almost nonstop with only one or two breaks. And It's great when the text which was assigned, I don't know how many years or decades ago the revised common lectionary put Psalm one thirty three on the second Sunday of Easter tide in year B (which is a bunch of liturgical mumbo jumbo you don't need to know) but the point is it was a long time ago and that Psalm hit us right where we live today and it's such a beautiful thing. By the way, the other thing that the lectionary provides for us is a sense of seasonality in the church, which is why the screen has the word Easter on it even though we celebrated Easter last week, the western church celebrated Easter last week. But now we're in the season of Easter, we sometimes call Eastertide so if you want to be very formal you can call Eastertide, but it's a series that will go on for several weeks now and we're going to be thinking about what it means to live a resurrection style life. Not just on one special holy day but for the rest of our lives. So Easter is a season not just a day. Season of resurrection.

So one of the other texts from the lectionary is where I want to spend some time that we have together today, and that is from the book of first John. Now there's the book of John which is the Gospel of John, the stories of Jesus and then there's the letters of John. There's three of them, they're very short they're near the back and one of the letters of John is what the

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lectionary gives us today. And it's a really, just absolutely gorgeous, passage of Scripture. It's one of those, I mean all Scripture is inspired and useful and all those things we love the Bible - all of it. Some of it's hard to read some of it's easier to read some of it seems very dull and some of it just comes absolutely alive and this is one of those passages that just comes absolutely alive. It's practically operatic in the way it comes alive for me anyway and so my hope is that mainly just reading this text will be a great way for the Spirit to speak to you today. If you'd like to follow along if you're a visual person encourage you to open a Bible the read Bibles go to page nine eighty nine. Is where this text will be found. And the last thing I'll say about that is if you do not own a Bible, please take that red Bible in your hand home with you today. It's yours, it's our gift to you and, good news they keep printing Bibles and we keep buying them and you can take one and take one for a friend. Anytime you need a Bible take one of these if you'd like.

So I will have a what hopefully will be a brief observation at the end, but mostly I want you to hear and receive this beautiful passage of Scripture verse John one one through to two. We declare to you what was from the beginning. What we have heard. What we have seen with our 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 was revealed to us. We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us. And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy and they be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light and in Him There is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true. But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. 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 and He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. This is the word of the Lord, Thanks be to God.

And it seems to me that there are two messages in this passage, one message kind of at the beginning, that's a very strong encouragement, a exhortation if you will, for one group of people. And then another message toward the end of the passage, a different type of very strong message, a very strong exhortation, for a different group of people. So what I want to do is, I want to start with that second one actually, cuz that is the one that stings a little bit. And

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then we will go back to the good stuff at the beginning. Can we do that way? So the group at the end, if you're in the group at the end who is intended to hear these words from John in the second half of the passage (and by the way, it may be John and some of his colleagues because there's a lot of "we" language in there. It's kind of interesting, "we" are writing this for this purpose and that kind of thing) but regardless if you're a recipient, an intended recipient, of that second part of the passage, well what you receive is actually kind of harsh- Isn't it? There are some of you I know in the room today who are in this group and I humbly hope that you will hear John's words, not so much my words, but John's words and that they will take root in your heart. That you will receive them with humility, and that they will effect a change in your life. Because this group of people in the second half of today's passage from first John, there are a group of people who say that they have fellowship with God, but in reality they are walking in the darkness. And John is not particularly subtle about this. John is kind of like the nice one in the Bible, the Paul stuff, see Paul gets real mean like practically every other word. But John you want to think like he's all about love and but no. He's pretty straightforward about this. He says if you are a person who claims to have fellowship with God but you're walking in the darkness, and we could talk about what that means, then what are you? You're a liar. And I don't play this card too often but sometimes you hear Pastor say this, "That's not me saying it, it's the Bible saying it. It's John calling you a liar, not me." Well, he says if you do that, claim that fellowship with God and walk in the darkness of your sin, then you're lying. He says you're not doing what is true which I think is really fascinating and very telling. When you talk about lying, what's the verb that usually goes before a lie? What do you do - a lie? You say lie, you tell a lie right? We think of lying is saying something that is not true. And John says you are lying, you are not doing what is true. Because what you are claiming for yourself is different from who you really are. and you're not just lying to other people, you're not just lying to God, Who else you LYING TO YOU? Are lying to yourself? He says you have deceived yourself. He says, "The truth is not in you". it's so ingrained that you couldn't even tell the truth if you wanted to. Because you have done the lie, you have done what is not true and you believe the lie about yourself. So people in Group B, I'm sorry to have to bring this message to you. But that's who you are. You are liars who are deceiving others deceiving God and deceiving yourselves.

But there is good news for people in that second group. Because if this passage has woken you up, the way I'm sure it woke up some of the original hearers and readers of this letter, you have a clear action to take. John is not subtle about this either, he says "confess your sins". Let's be honest about it, just say what is true. And the good news, and this is one of the most famous passages of Scripture, when we confess he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins. And not just forgive us of our sins, but cleanse us from all unrighteousness. By the way, it's part of the symbology of baptism - it's cleansing. And when I pour water over someone's head, it's

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symbolically washing them clean. It's not me washing them clean, it's the work of God in their lives. And sometimes we've done immersion baptisms where you go all the way under. The symbology is even more alarming then. It's like you you've been died with Christ and you're being raised up again to new life. So if you are in the second group if you're the recipient of the words in the second half of today's passage from first John. You know what you need to do. You need to confess. Now, it is my deepest hope, and I think this is true that Artistan Church is a place of grace and mercy, God's grace and mercy not mine, as if you needed that anyway. But those who confess would be welcomed here and not shamed. Those who confess would be invited into a new life. Not cast out into isolation and death and shame because what John rightly identifies as your deception of yourself and others. Is nothing worse than what any of us has already done? Including me, the person that they're silly enough to give a microphone to most weeks out of the year. And we will joyfully welcome people in that second group because Jesus spent his entire ministry welcoming people from that second group. He went to his death in order to welcome sinners, to save them, to redeem them and to recreate them to resurrect them into some new life. So it's not I who invite you to this confession, and that there's a new stage of life, it's Jesus himself. So if you've heard his invitation, what will you do? Will you respond?

So that's the second half of the passage, that's the group B people. Right now, group A people let's talk. Those of us who get to hear the nice or first half of that passage, did you notice how exuberant and joyful It started out before it got down into the muck and mire of walking in darkness and sin and confession? "We declare to you the eternal life that was with the father and was revealed to us. We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us. And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." It's like bubbling over with happiness and joy and confidence. And for those of us who've already set our way to be the way of Jesus, we can receive this word as a as a joyful reminder of a couple of things. Two reminders that I'm going to point out here. First of all, declaration is the normal response to Christ's salvation. If you have been adopted into the family of God, and isn't that a beautiful metaphor that's used here? You ought to join John, we ought to join John, in declaring this truth to each other. I tell you that verb declare appears three times in just the very beginning of this passage. We should declare this truth not only to each other but to anyone else who needs to hear the good news of Christ's wide welcome. And I think most of us are mostly silent about it most of the time and that's a shame.

I actually have a theory about why. I think a lot of us who came to faith some time ago have a version of the the gospel, the so-called good news of Jesus in our minds. Which we actually don't think is very good news at all, which tells kind of an ugly story in which we don't want to share or declare because we have not seen good fruit from it. And often it's easy to pick on the

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people with the megaphones outside of Frontier Field before the baseball games right? Baseball is a sport that people used to go and watch in decades past -but trust me there's a field and you can go there, and there are people with megaphones and I'm like, "Oh people are going on. If only they...", and then I realize- well they're declaring something and I'm just kind of like sneaking past them hoping that nobody ever connects me to them. And, to make sure that no one does, I will be sure not to declare anything at all, right? What if we got to the place of such humility that we realize that anytime we start declaring anything, we're going to get parts of the story wrong and that the Holy Spirit can cover for us right? And so that maybe what we have to, like, stop tearing other people down and start lifting our own voices up but. But I do think that a lot of us have a story of the Gospel that's rooted in shame and a God who is angry and vindictive and destructive. And we don't have any interest in declaring that God to anybody but we don't have a better way of telling the story.

My hope is that we can develop a better way to tell the story. We can we can tell, in fact, the story that is present in the scriptures of a God whose first, past, present and future posture toward us is always one of love. Of a God who started the whole story by creating the world and calling it good. Don't dive into,, don't dive into Genesis Chapter three Bible nerds. Just remember Genesis one and two. Anyway I think if we, if we had a better more beautiful gospel in our minds, and in our hearts, we might be more inclined to declare it to other people. So that's the first reminder that declaration is actually the normal response to Christ salvation and to God's goodness. Here's a second reminder for those of us in the first group. Alright group A people here comes the slightly bad news for you and for me, which is that there are probably not two groups. John writes this letter, there's no line in the text that says it's OK group A you sit over here now. I'm going to talk to the group B people who really need to hear it. Now it's all just one thing. I made it all up. It's a sermonic device. John goes right from this exuberant joyful declaration of God's goodness and salvation which you've all been able to embrace, he's saying to group A people. And then goes right into this mess about if you claim to have fellowship with God, but walk the darkness, you are lying. And he's not talking to a different group of people, he's talking to the same group of people. So if you were feeling abashed a minute ago because I was lumping you in Group B, and especially if you're feeling proud a minute later when I was putting you in Group A, I got good news for some of you and not so good news for the rest of you. All of us ought to take seriously the possibility that we are moving about the world in a state of self-deception. All of us should endeavor to be, with each passing day, more sensitive to the Holy Spirit's call to move out of that state of self-deception and into the state of confession, repentance, and new life. Because yes, there is a kind of binary -you were this thing, you were dead, and now you're alive in Christ. There is that singular experience of faith that you have sometimes, maybe often. Maybe that's the more normal

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thing than the other. But the truth is, whether that was your experience of conversion or not, all of us each and every one of us is like this whir, whir, whir thing right. We're drifting back into the old ways we're, as Tolstoy said, stumbling drunkenly across the path to home- through the darkness of the night. And I think one of our problems is that we think, "Well, I got that taken cared of. That guy poured water over my head, or dumped me under the water, or I prayed that prayer, at that crusade (or whatever might have been). I had my first communion. Now I'm in Group A. Boy, am I so glad I wasn't in Group B anymore.

So all of us should hear this good news as the passage concludes. If anyone does sin, and raise your hand if you didn't to this week. We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. There is a good, beautiful gospel that we can declare.

One of the best ways to declare that good gospel is to celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. We've had the sacrament of baptism today and now we have the sacrament of communion. If one is the Sacrament of welcome, the ritual of initiation, this is the Sacrament of sustenance and maintenance. And there's a part in the New Testament where Paul is talking about taking communion and says every time you do this, you proclaim the Lord's death until he returns. And of course when you proclaim his death, you proclaim His resurrection as well. And so if you are ready to declare, declare Jesus and declare for Jesus, this table is open for you.

Artisan has an open communion table which means that anybody who's following Jesus is invited to come and partake of the bread in the cup. You don't have to be a member of our church. Let me say it this way, this is the Iona invitation which is quite beautiful. This is the table not of the church but of the Lord. Is to be made ready for those who love him and who want to love him more. So come you who have much faith, and you who have little. You who have been here often, and you who have not been for a long time. You have tried to follow, and you who have failed. Come, not because it is I who invite you, it is our Lord. It is His will that those who want him should meet him here. And so our table is open. Now, despite the fact it's open, you may choose for your own reasons not to participate in community. If you're not a follower of Jesus, it's fine for you to be to sit and observe this. To receive prayer, a member of the prayer team will be at the back of the room happy to pray with anyone who needs prayer today. Your children by the way are welcome to take commune with you. If they don't, please go get them right after you take it because their time is coming to an end down there as well. And remember that the waters of baptism are here. You can remember your own and be thankful as you come to the table of the Lord and receive His Grace. Let's continue to worship God at table in song and in prayer in

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[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com