

Our Epistle lesson this Sunday after Easter is written sometime a little after 100 A.D. by the apostle John, one of Jesus' first disciples...a first century man who had walked side by side with Jesus and witnessed Christ's many miracles firsthand...one of the three disciples Jesus regarded as a sort of 'executive committee', along with Peter and James...a man Jesus referred to as *'the Beloved'*...the only disciple mentioned as being present at and during Christ's crucifixion...the very man to whom Jesus, from the Calvary Cross, bequeathed his own mother... *Mother, this is your son; son, this is your mother.* This man, this author, named John was arguably one of Jesus' very closest friends.

One theologian and commentator writes this about John and this first letter of John: *'Think of this as an anxious sermon written by a pastor who loved his people and sent out to the various Churches over which he had charge. It is a homily written out of a devoted pastor's love and care and concern for his people.'* John would have been a well-aged-man by the time he wrote this. He repeatedly appeals to his readers as *'little children'*, with the first verse of chapter 2 serving as an example. John exhorts these loved ones to maintain the original zeal and courage of their faith in their love for one another.

By 100 A.D. many of the Christians were second or even third generation believers. The thrill of the first days and of the new discovery, had, at least to some extent, diminished. It is always a challenge to effectively pass along, to pass down the values of our faith to the generations after us. In the first days and years of Christianity, following Jesus' resurrection and Ascension, there was a glory, a splendor, a wonder, and a powerful commitment demonstrated by people willing to die for their faith. But, as can still occur in the years following one's initial acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior, matters of the faith had become more expectation than exultation... more 'habit' than discipline! 'Habit', by the way, is defined as *'a repetitious behavior requiring little or no thinking'*. By 100 A.D. many people had grown used to Christianity and, clearly, something of the wonder and joy of following Jesus had worn off...This is why John wrote this New Testament letter.

Jesus prophesied to his disciples that this would happen, as we read in Matthew 24:3-12/ *'Beware that no one leads you astray...Many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another...The love of many will grow cold.'* This First Letter of John is, likely, written to the Christians in the city of Ephesus, about whom Jesus said in The Book of Revelation [2:4ff]/ *'But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first...repent, and do the works you did at first.'*

Members of the early Church~~as happens in the Christian Church of each succeeding generation~~were finding that actually following and living like Jesus is not always easy or comfortable. People did not, today do not, want to be 'saints' in the New Testament sense

of this term. The Greek word we translate 'saint' is *'hagios'*, which means 'holy' and 'different' and 'set apart'. The Temple was *'hagios'* because it was different from every other building; remember the Sabbath was *'hagios'* because it was different from every other day; Communion is *'hagios'* because it is different from every other meal; and the Christian was to be *'hagios'* because a Christian is to be different from every other person. *'In the world, but not of the world'* is how Jesus put it.

This disciple, apostle, and now author named John has the goal of every faithful pastor or preacher...namely, to produce and prosper a fellowship among believers and with God. John states this early on in this letter, reading verse 3: *'We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.'* Reading 4 verses later: *'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...'* John is making his proclamation, John is preaching this sermon, John is writing and sending this 'love letter' ***'so that'*** a fellowship will be created and protected among the believers and an earthly and eternal fellowship created between the believers and God Himself! The aim of every faithful pastor, and faithful-parishioner I quickly add, is to come along side another in order to bring them closer to others in the Church, and to God through the Church...into friendship with God and one another. This is the great commission to which Jesus calls us and for which God instituted the Church.

But, Christians continue to comment, 'What am I to say?' Closely associated with this timeless question is a litany of excuses, including: 'I never went to Seminary'... 'I'm not very good at speaking'... 'I haven't read the Bible enough'... and 'There must be people better able to share their faith'. Let me be quick and clear: There is no one better suited to share your faith than you! As we sing in the great hymn of the church: *'This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior, all the day long.'* **My story...My song!**

The aging John states clearly all that properly prepares a person to share their faith...to *'proclaim'*, as this term is repeated 3 times in the first three verses. In a single phrase, when we *'proclaim'* or tell our story, we are to simply, honestly, and accurately share what we have personally experienced. No exaggeration, no embellishment. We are to 'go with what we know!' As in the insurance company commercial on television: "We know a few things because we've seen a few things." Hear, again, what John writes: *'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched---this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.'* [1 Jn. 1:1] When we have heard...seen...looked at...touched something of the wonder and love of God, we have our story and our proclamation is unique and precious and God expects it to be proclaimed!

What we are to proclaim is our own story, our own song, and to do so in our faithful effort to experience and expand Christian fellowship with one another through Christ! Amen.