

# Sermon April 6, 1997

**Title: Forgiveness and Fellowship**

**Text: 1 John 1:1 - 2:2**

**Theme: Relationship with God and with our fellow Christians**

**Purpose: Strengthen relationships with one another and with God**

Listening to  
the older

I am always very interested in when older people share some of their experiences in life. They have experiences that they have lived with over a long period of time and they have thought over those experiences over and over. When they share those key experiences in their life then there is wisdom, knowledge, deep thinking there. One should listen to and try to learn from what others have gone through before. Gaining experiences yourself is not easy and learning from the experiences of others - especially from those having almost a whole life behind them - is very helpful.

The Elder

There was one person in the early Church who was called simply "the elder". He was old and well known and carried that title for decades. "The Elder" was a title of honor a sign of love to the "elder" bestowed by the members of the churches on him. And he in turn referred to the members of the churches simply as "my little children".

He lived a very long life.

He was one of Jesus' first disciples and he survived all others. When Peter had passed away, when Paul was gone, he was still around for a long time.

Other disciples wrote a few decades after Jesus was crucified about their experiences. It seems to have taken him 50 to 60 years before he began to write about what he experienced with Jesus. For a long time after the other 12 apostles had passed away "the elder" stayed on and saw the church growing and the faith spreading and had to deal with all the troubles in the churches. But he was well known for the love that he had for all the congregations and their members.

Famous  
Story of the  
elder

We have reports about "the elder" from the time of the early church at the end of the first century. When he reached his nineties he became very weak.

He could no longer walk to church or preach about Christ like he used to do.

But "the elder" then had some younger people carry him on a stretcher to church. He still had the ear of the congregations. And it was reported over and over again that he tried to preach even in his weakness saying just one powerful sentence whenever he made it to the service:

**My little Children, love one another!**

John the  
beloved

Who was that the elder? The disciple who was around for so long?

It was the disciple that also had the name the "beloved disciple".

As you probably all have found out by now: It was John, the Apostle!

If you have listened to the reading today, you probably know that we have heard his words today both in the Gospel Lesson for today from the Gospel of John and from the Second Reading for this Sunday which is the beginning of the First Letter of John. John wrote five books of the New Testament: The Gospel of John, 3 Letters and Revelation.

Prepare  
to read

I would like to talk about our reading from the First Letter of John today. Take out the Lesson sheet so can read along while I talk about what John, the beloved, the elder is writing and saying to us today. Or if you prefer use one of those Bibles in the pews.

Let us read again the first three verse of the Second Reading. Hear what the elder, what John the Apostle has to say:

**(1) 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.**

**(2) 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**

**(3) 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 the  
apostles

Who is **we**? “We declare to you?” Why is John here speaking in this strange way? John is here speaking in the name of all the Apostles, the twelve disciples of Jesus. “We” the apostles, the witnesses tell you .... We the ones on whose foundation the church was build are speaking to you now.

What is this that was in the beginning? What did the apostles hear? What did the disciples see? What did they look at? Whom did they touch?

The  
eyewitness

John was an eyewitness to Jesus. He saw Jesus die on the Cross. He saw Jesus after his resurrection. He walked with Jesus through Israel for a couple of years. So also did the other apostles. What John is saying here is:

*I saw it!*

*I saw Jesus preaching, I saw him healing, I saw Christ dying on the cross, I saw Jesus Christ when he rose from the dead. And I actually was so close to Jesus that I touched him with my hands. I did not only see a part of it but I saw it from the beginning!*

Doubts  
regarding  
Jesus

One of the reasons that John was so strong on this was that already at that time there were people saying that Jesus was not really human and that he did not really die on a cross. There was an angel or some other divine being but not a Jesus who was both human and divine.

What we need to realize here is that we are not just talking about fantasy stories here. This actually happened and you are now hearing an eyewitness speak to you through this reading.

The apostles  
sharing the  
experience

And what was the effect of John and the Apostles hearing and experiencing Jesus? Following his teaching? The apostles were drawn into fellowship, into a partnership of life with the Father and Jesus Christ himself. John wants us to hear what he has heard, see what he has seen, experience what he has experienced so that the listeners to this letter

are also drawn into that Fellowship. John *wants you* to share in this fellowship, in the relationship with Christ and the Father.

And with that Fellowship comes eternal life from God the Father. Life that will stay on even after we pass on from this world or will even stay after this world passes away.

John said in John 5:24

*Most assuredly I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*

We do not need an UFO following a Comet to take us away to some higher plane of existence. We can have eternal life now! The Gate of Heaven is here right now.

**(4) We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.**

What is John's joy? It is to share the fellowship and the eternal life with others.

**(5) 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.**

Light and  
Darkness

They heard the message from him meaning from Jesus. God is light. What does light mean:

Holiness, Openness, Clarity, Truthfulness, Honesty, Purity

And darkness:

Sin, Closed, Hidden agendas, Hiding something, Uncleaness

**(6) If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true;**

Hiding.  
Dishonesty

Here John puts his finger on a big problem of Christians. We say that we are Christian (and with that comes the claim of living in fellowship with Christ) but we are not living in light. Instead we are hiding ourselves, attempting to get some tactical advantage by deceiving others and ourselves. We are not open and honest with God and our fellow Christians.

John says here: Sorry, you can claim as much as you want of living with Christ but if you do not walk in the light as God is light then there is no fellowship and you are separate from God! There is a question mark on you being a "Christian" if you persist to walk in darkness.

**(7) .. but if 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.**

And here are the benefits of living in the light being honest, open and holy. Not only will we have fellowship with God but moreover we will have real fellowship with others. And

Bringing  
the  
darkness  
into light

if we sin, if we make mistakes, if we screw up then the blood of Jesus is there for us to cleanse us from all sins and despite those sins we will be in fellowship with God.

If we can be open about our mistakes, acknowledge the shameful things we have done in secret, if we bring our darkness to the light then our craving for meaningful relationships will be satisfied. Relationships with others will improve. The fellowship of God makes deeper fellowship with others possible.

**(8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

Awareness  
of sin mark  
of a  
Christian

If someone claims to be without sin, to be perfect then that is only a self deception. Everyone is a sinner, and if someone is not aware of that then I am afraid for his soul because he deceives himself. Being aware of problems, of sins in ones life is a mark of a true believer. Rejoice when God shows you the truth about yourself for here you have a sign of the Holy Spirit at work in you.

**(9) If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Confession  
of sin

For the forgiveness of sins, responsibility for those things need to be accepted. It is important to pray and confess -- what we have done wrong -- at least in front of God. Sometimes it might be helpful to confess sins also to one another and pray together for those problems. Believers are authorized to forgive one anothers sins! Let us share our weaknesses before God!

**(10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.**

Refuse sin  
and refuse  
God

But if we do not accept that we have sinned then that will separate us from Christ and from faith and his word will not be in us and we will not have eternal life.

**(2:1) 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, (2:2) and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.**

Here we have the characteristic word of the Elder John to his “children”. You are some of his children. So listen well to the words he has said to you.

Fellowship  
How to?

What I learned from what John the Elder said is:

Christian Fellowship is a sharing of God’s love and it is a sharing in God’s love. It is a sharing of community. It is not people in isolation worshipping God. If you have the right relationship with Christ then this will also reflect on your relationship with others. And others will help you strenghtening the relationship with Christ you need.

Share your life.

If we want to strengthen this church then we need to get involved with one another. I do not think it is good if we only see one other on formal occasions on Sundays but also during the week. Try to share each others burden. It is important to share both sorrow and joy with one another and that is often not possible in something formal like a worship service. Bring your concerns and your praise to God with your friends and in private meetings with others.

Meaningful relationships

Meaningful relationships are very important both for our faith as well as for our church. They are a hard things to work on and often people avoid the challenge nowadays. It is so easy to get glued to the TV set so that we do not have to talk with one another. Driving around in town alone in our little metal cells we call cars is not helping things either.

Relationships hurt.

Working on relationships can be very hurtful. One needs to be open about one's own life and someone else might misunderstand and say something that hurts very much. And even worse somebody else might recognize something wrong in your life that you have never seen and are ashamed of! Being open for meaningful relationships results in vulnerability. There is a price to be paid and a sacrifice to be made.

If you begin praying to God and living in fellowship with him: Even there you will be vulnerable. What if God tells you something is wrong with you?

Jesus said:

*Matt 16:24*

*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*

It always comes back to this: Are you willing to sacrifice you own self? Be open, be vulnerable? Are you willing to loose your life?

Jesus was vulnerable, he held nothing back. He was willing to let himself be sacrificed on a cross. Are you willing to sacrifice yourself? Or do you have to hold on to your on self?

A Christian needs to follow his master. Jesus is your master.

A wise man once said: Christian conduct comes from Christian beliefs.

Fellowship with God and with one another comes through:

- A. Openness and honesty about sins and problems before God and before one another. Hiding things will separate us and separate you from God. Honesty with one another is very important. Grumbling in secret about something that is wrong among us will separate us.
- B. Awareness of our sins. No one is perfect or sinless.
- C. Do you think you are perfect or without sin? Be careful here. This get dangerous!

Believe the elder John and follow his advice. Reread the Second Reading if you have a chance and think about his words.

Amen.