

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

**1 John 1 (Full and eternal life)**

**Talk by Russell Jones, Prayers by Betty Friend**

### **Welcome**

Welcome to this morning's service. Today we will hear the words of John, the disciple who witnessed the power of Jesus, his death and resurrection. John went on to explain that 'God is light' and 'God is love' in his gospel and letters. Over Christmas we hear about the coming of God into the world as a child, of light entering darkness, and our passage, which is 1st John chapter 1, will be about the meaning of that for our lives.

First of all, Betty will lead us in our prayers.

### **Prayers**

Almighty and everlasting Father, we bring you our thanks and praise for the greatest gift this world has ever received, your Son our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who came into the world as a baby, lived on earth and died on a cross for our sins. 2020 has been a difficult time, since in addition to the ongoing problems of violence, famine, flood, homelessness, and people struggling on benefits, we have been hit by coronavirus. This has put strain on the NHS and other vital services, and we thank you for those who have carried out their work faithfully. Many have reduced incomes or have lost jobs or businesses. We pray that you will provide for those in need. We thank you for the provision for our food bank and for our CAP centre.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

We pray for strength and comfort for those who have been bereaved, either through covid 19 or other causes; for those who are lonely; and for those who are disappointed that family gatherings had to be changed at short notice. We thank you for the unsung heroes who are keeping in touch by phone, shopping for the elderly and generally caring. We pray that with the new strain of virus, people will take care to obey the rules and so protect themselves and others.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

Lord we look forward to 2021 with optimism, knowing that you will always be beside us. There is now the vaccine which we pray will be effective. Thank you for the ingenuity of scientists who have produced it in record time. We look forward to the appointment of a new vicar and thank you for your provision to enable us to install a new boiler.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

As we face the anxiety of what will happen after Brexit, give our political leaders wisdom and integrity to do what is right for every section of the community. Help our local councils to make the right decisions as they decide how to manage the budgets so that essential services may be maintained.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our world where, while we are celebrating, people are coping with the lack of clean water, employment and medical care. We thank you for missionaries, thinking especially of the Day family in Thailand, and those bringing aid to the poor and destitute. We pray for Christians who are being persecuted in so many countries thinking especially of those in Nigeria, India, Pakistan and Iran. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

Finally, we pray for our family at St. Johns and our soon to be family at Holy Trinity. We thank you for Steve and Ian, Sue and Andrew for the way they have kept the church ticking over during these difficult times. We thank you for the miracle of zoom which has allowed us to communicate and share fellowship, not only the regulars at St. John's, but those who have been joining us from around the country. It has been reported that many people who are not regular church goers have been searching websites and you tube to find out about the Christian life. We ask your blessing on the Alpha course which is starting in January, on those who are facilitating it and those who wish to learn more about you. We pray your divine healing on those who are suffering in mind, body or spirit thinking especially of Zak, Audrey and Keith and Barbara. Let us take a moment to bring before the Lord those known to us personally who need the loving touch of Jesus

Lord in your mercy - **hear our prayer.**

Father accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. We will now join in the prayer that Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

## Reading 1 John 1

*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. <sup>2</sup> The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> We write this to make our joy complete.*

*<sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup> If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

*<sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.*

This is the Word of the Lord – **thanks be to God.**

## Sermon

In our house we like Christmas to be a cosy imitation of our childhood Christmases, with the tree and presents, and special food. Family around, and so on, and the Christmas story from the Bible is part of that feeling. It's an element of the childhood memory that contributes to the overall effect of the season. But when we read the opening verses in John's letter, we understand how real this is, not a seasonal entertainment like a ghost story. 'That which was from the beginning', that is, it has always existed, is something 'which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched'. It was personal to John, it was very real, and it was the meaning of his and everyone's life. This was his testimony, his proclamation of the eternal life. 'I've heard it, seen it, touched it – believe me!', he's saying.

If you were God, and you had this great gift of life that you wanted everyone to enjoy, and to live it in fulfilment with you, how would you reveal yourself? God created, but creation is only part of the story of God's love. There is the Bible where God speaks fully. Best of all, the most complete revelation, is Jesus. This is why Jesus is called 'the Word of life', because he is God's revelation of himself. Jesus, the Christ, is to us what our words are to others. Our words show others what we think and feel. Jesus shows others what God thinks and feels. He knows the mind and heart of God; he speaks God's thoughts and feelings to us; when we know Jesus, we know God, and we are in fellowship with the source of eternal life. It wasn't John's physical nearness to Jesus that made him what he was, an apostle totally committed to his Lord; it was his spiritual nearness, which we can also have, along with the excitement and constant regenerative sense of newness that accompanies it through our walk with him, and ultimately the promise of eternity with him.

Jesus shares in fellowship with humanity so that we can share fellowship with God. Here's an odd true story. A writer was leaving Liverpool on a ship and saw the other passengers waving to friends on the dock. He rushed down to the dock and asked a boy 'Would you wave to me if I paid you?'. The boy agreed, and when the writer went back to the ship's rail, sure enough the boy was waving and that made him happy. He didn't want to be lonely, and we all want someone to want us. The reality of Christian life is that God is with us; we have fellowship with

him and with one another. That's why verse 4 says 'We write this to make our joy complete'. The joy is real, and it comes out of our fellowship with God and with each other.

Witnessing, as John does here, isn't the same as wrangling with someone about religious beliefs. There is quite a lot here about the contrast between walking in light and walking in darkness because John was countering false teaching that was spreading at the time. When you look at the heresies of the ancient world, they are almost exactly the same as the false teachings of our world. The particular one countered here was that Jesus was man but not god, often accompanied by its pal, Jesus was god but not really man. John was asserting the truth of his own experience as a reply, shedding light in the darkness.

The second paragraph of the chapter can be summed up simply enough. God is light and sin is darkness. When our fellowship with God, proclaimed in verses 1-4, is real, we cannot keep to a dark path. There is a contrast running through this section, between walking and talking, or acting and speaking. As the expression goes, he can talk the talk, but can he walk the walk? Take a look at the first three words in verses 6, 8 and 10. 'If we claim'...is repeated because we have to do more than say we live a Christian life, we have to do it. We don't only claim things, we live them out, and if we are living in sin, then that's like walking in the darkness. In the Bible, Christian life is often compared to a walk, and that makes sense. When we're children, we have to learn to walk, unsteady at first but gaining confidence and strength, holding onto supportive people and helpful objects. We overcome difficulties along the way. Walking in darkness is like making life's journey with the unsteadiness of a toddler, stumbling in the darkness of sin.

It's probably useful to think about what sin is, rather than leave it out there as something to worry about. Sin is not indulging in a cream cake or a drink. Sin is an inward desire, a rebellion against what God wants for us. It is turning away from God to rule our own lives, so it leads to actions that show no trust in God and separate us from him. The Bible is full of heroes of the faith who sinned badly, like Abraham who married Hagar to 'help God along' by having the son he'd been promised, or David who had a child with Bathsheba and arranged the death of her husband, or Peter who denied that he knew Jesus three times before the cock crew. Christians do sin, and this really bothers some people, and it especially bothers new Christians. We receive a new nature in Christ but it doesn't completely eliminate the old nature that we have had from birth and throughout all the training of our upbringing as part of the world. Sin in a Christian isn't necessarily an enormous hypocrisy; it is more often a remnant. The only way that the old nature can be controlled and helped to atrophy, waste away until it nearly disappears, is when we welcome the Holy Spirit of God, walk in the light, and so produce the new fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, listed in Galatians 5.22-23, in our new natures.

What this symbol of light and dark tells us is how we react to sin. We try to cover it up, hide it in the darkness, by lying. Verse 6, 'we lie and do not live by the truth'. We look OK, we talk the talk, when we claim to be without sin, but we live in darkness, we don't walk the walk. If we're not honest about it, we will usually find that we don't feel blessed by reading the Bible any more, then we don't feel part of the fellowship with God's people, and then prayer will become empty and worship will be a dull routine.

The point is that God loves and because he loves, he wants to forgive. We have heard verses 8 and 9 many times after we've made confession in our services, because they offer a promise of forgiveness, of being made right with God through his gracious gift of that forgiveness. The word

confess doesn't mean 'admit'. It literally means 'say the same thing about', because what we do is say the same thing about our sin as God does. It isn't saying a nice prayer, or making excuses, it's naming sin by what God calls it: envy, deceit, hatred or whatever else it might be. It is being honest and facing the sin.

God is light and sin is dark, and the two can't exist together. You can't open a door in the daytime to a dark house and see the darkness flood out of the house and conquer the light. In the same way, when we confess to the darkness and open the door, God is faithful to his promises and just in his judgment of us, and 'will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness'. His light will flood into every corner of the closed house if we bravely open the doors and curtains to all of the rooms within us. That is the familiar assurance of verse 9. God can uphold his own justice, remain true to his own nature, and still forgive sin. Because at the cross he judged sin. Jesus offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins; he took our place and died for God's people. He lives for us now at God's right hand and pleads for us when we face condemnation. He applies his sacrifice to our needs day-by-day, and God's Spirit refreshes, empowers, and guides us towards the light so that our walk becomes lighter, increasingly filled with the fruits of the Spirit, each day. We are gradually and continually cleansed inwardly so that his word, in both senses of 'word', has a place in our lives. As chapter 2 verse 2 explains, 'Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world'.

The Christmas story begins the rescue of humanity by God's intervention. God reveals himself as one of us, a helpless traveller born in poverty who will save the world in the power of the Father's love.

### **Blessing**

To conclude our service, a final blessing.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Amen