

Sermon May 16, 2021  
Redeemer, Ramsey  
Pastor Michael Linderman

Grace, Mercy and Peace from God our Creator, and from our Lord and Savior  
Jesus Christ, Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Happy 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in the season of Easter!

Our series of sermons on our second lesson from the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of John comes to  
an end today.

So far, we've had sermons on

--2<sup>nd</sup> Easter: 1 John 1:1-2:2

We learned about the testimony of the letter writer that had apostolic roots in  
the community that wrote the Gospel of John.

--3<sup>rd</sup> Easter: 1 John 3:1-7

We learned about how amazing it is to be called Children of God; "See what love  
the father has given us that we should be called children of God."

--4<sup>th</sup> Easter: 1 John 3:16-24

We learned about the conflict in the letter writer's church between belief in Christ  
and practicing love in action.

--5<sup>th</sup> Easter: 1 John 4:7-21

We learned about the truth of God's love for us, which is so powerful that the  
letter writer proclaims that in fact, God IS love.

Last week, 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter: 1 John 5:1-6

We learned about the importance of obedience to the commandment of love,  
and the teaching that faith in God conquers the world.

This week, 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter: 1 John 5:9-13

We learn that we have inherited a great testimony, which gives us eternal life  
from God. It is a blessing to possess and believe in this testimony.

We close this sermon series today on the topic of the testimony, and the life of God that we receive when we believe the testimony. What does the letter writer mean by testimony?

To retrace the theological roots of this term in the letter writer's church, we reach back again into the Gospel of John, chapter 19:34, where the soldier pierces the side of Jesus who is being crucified on the cross and blood and water flow out. In Verse 35, the narrator adds "He who saw this has testified so that you may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth." This assures the reader that the beloved disciple in the Gospel of John, who is called the one whom Jesus loved, and whose testimony is the basis for this Gospel, was an eyewitness to Jesus' death. His testimony is the foundation for the community that formed around John's Gospel. It is his testimony that gives authority to the community of believers who have followed his teaching.

The question here is the pedigree of belief that you have inherited and carry in your heart. In the conflict that I have described in previous week's sermons, the community that the letter writer is addressing is divided between those who believe only in the spiritual aspect of Jesus's presence, and those who believe in the full life and death of Jesus. For the letter writer it is not enough to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. You must also understand the importance of Jesus death as a human, that despite being the son of God, he was also a real man who died a human death. From Jesus' death and then resurrection, we receive the benefits of God's love in action. Since God loves us like this, then we are called to put love into action as well.

The testimony that the community is passing on here, and which the letter writer is trying to call all members of the church to agree on, therefore comes from God. It comes from God because it testifies to the Son of God, who the community stresses is also the man Jesus of Nazareth, the one who really did die on the cross for us all. If we believe otherwise concerning the identity of the Son, and especially if we believe that his death was not important for our faith, then we neglect the God-given testimony that the community carries. So the letter writer can warn us that if we don't believe the testimony, we make God into a liar, since God gave the testimony in the first place that was witnessed by the beloved disciple, the father of this community of faith.

I mentioned the importance of testimony in one of the earlier sermons of this series on the day when we also celebrated a baptism in the service. The point was that it is this testimony, about Jesus as the son of God who died for our sins on the cross, gives shape to our faith. Faith comes from God, but there are so many other people who help shape it as it grows in our hearts. We all become fellow witnesses to this truth as we come together as a community to baptize a new member in the body of Christ. The parents are testifying, the godparents are testifying, and the community of faith, the congregation is testifying to the truth that we believe in, and which we hope to pass on.

And what is the church but the community of witnesses down through the ages who have carried this faith in their hearts. This testimony starts with the disciples themselves, who were the eyewitnesses to the events at the center of the Gospel story. They are Peter, Andrew, James and John, Philip and Thaddeus, Bartholomew, Thomas, James, Matthew, Simon, and Matthias, who replaced Judas Iscariot. These are the early eye-witnesses. They are the first layer of bricks in the structure that makes up the church on earth. They are so important that they literally surround those of you who have gathered in the sanctuary today. Our stained glass medallions in the windows of this church building each refer to one of these early disciples. So when you are sitting in this sanctuary, you are literally surrounded by their witness.

But we know there were many more, both men and women, Mary the mother of our Lord, Johanna and Salome, Mary Magdalene, and Lydia, Dorcas and Phoebe. Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, Stephen, Timothy, Mark and Luke, Perpetua and Felicity, a diverse set of witnesses who were among the earliest generations of witnesses who risked their lives to spread the faith they had received.

Don't forget about the important teachers of the church, the Church fathers, as they are called, who in the early medieval period, helped shape the belief of the church through the theology of the great creeds that we still use today. Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, Papias of Hierapolis, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria and Origen of Alexandria.

In the late medieval period, we have the great expositors of the tradition, men and women who wrote of their experiences of faith. Believers like Hildegard of

Bingen, and Julian of Norwich, St. Anselm of Canterbury, Duns Scotus, and Thomas Aquinas, Joan of Arc, and Catherine of Siena.

Of course, we owe our own faith to the Reformers of the Protestant reformation, Martin Luther, Phillip Melancthon, John Calvin, and later European Lutherans, Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe, Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, and Lutheran theologians in America, such as Henry Melchior Muhlenberg. And don't forget popular modern Lutherans of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nathan Soderblom, Dag Hammarskjold, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

This abbreviated list is based on the list of festivals and commemorations listed in the front of our hymnals, pages 15 through 17. It's heavy on white European men, but the list has been expanded over the years to include many famous women of faith, as well as those Christians in other countries who have become important figures in the history of Christianity in their own right.

There are the martyrs of Japan, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth in the US, Oscar Romero, Bishop of El Salvador, Toyohiko Kagawa of Japan, the martyrs of Uganda, Seattle, chief of the Duwamish Confederacy of Native American tribes, Onesimos Nesib of Ethiopia. There is Justus Falckner, the first Lutheran ordained in America, and Jehu Jones, the first African American pastor in America, and the great figures of social renewal, such as Martin Luther King Jr.

And how many names have been left out of this list? How many witnesses are there who listened to the testimony, believed in Christ, and lived out the command to love in their lives as individual Christians? They were never famous for writing a biblical commentary, or composing a hymn, or translating the bible, or famous for writing a theological tract. How many were just a simple, loving companion to other people, who were courageous in their own small ways, and were willing to walk alongside others in the gentle and generous spirit of Christ?

Yes, my friends, there are so many. The letter to the Hebrews wraps up its own list of spiritual greats in chapter 12:1 by saying, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." It is this cloud of witnesses that surround us every day through the power of the Holy Spirit that is with us. When the letter writer of 1<sup>st</sup>

John says that those who don't believe make God a liar, it should be remembered that in the same way, we would make this great congregation of witnesses out to be liars as well, even though they did not act for their own sakes, but were willing to dedicate their lives to the explication and revelation of the love of God in Jesus Christ so that others may come to believe. But thanks be to God, that in the power of the Holy Spirit given to us, we know and have come to believe the testimony, in verse 11: "that God gave us life, and this life is in his Son."

In other words, dear listener, this works best when we take up the testimony that has been given to us and live according to it in our life. Share it with others, let them know you are a believer, and that because you follow Christ, you will live the way of his love. This way of believing, trusting, and loving, gives us God's eternal life. This life is the life of the Son, the life of God which came into the world, was crucified for our sakes, and was raised from death on the third day. Even though the world did not receive it, it means everything to us, and through it, we have been given the gift of faith. Today, you and I are being called to live our lives through the power of his abundant life. And he has promised, it will become for us a spring of spiritual water that never runs dry.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.