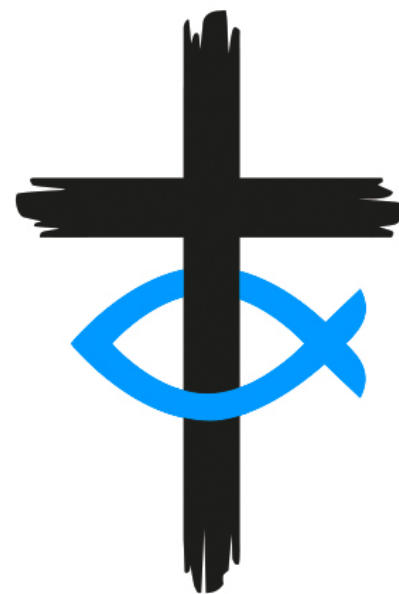


Daily Devotions from the URC
2 and 3 John



1 - July

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Monday 1st July

The Rev'd Ron Reid is a retired minister in the Mersey Synod serving as Link Minister at Rock Chapel, Farndon. He is a member at Upton-by-Chester URC

Reading: 1 John 5: 18 - 21

We know that those who are born of God do not sin, but the one who was born of God protects them, and the evil one does not touch them. We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Reflection

A difficult passage to conclude this letter. It is perhaps no wonder that one commentator suggests that it is unclear and that there is little agreement as to what it means, or even why the last sentence is there at all.

Yet certainty is there in the three-fold statement of knowledge. We know that the Christian is freed from the power of sin; that the Christian lives in a world where there is sin; and that the Christian is given understanding and discernment. Hence a Christian is able to differentiate between a life which is dominated by sin and by idols and a life lived in the truth of God as exemplified in Jesus Christ.

That of course is easy to say, but a lot less easy for the Christian to acknowledge and to put into practice. However, William Barclay commenting on this passage in the Daily Study Bible [1] suggests that “we live in a civilisation permeated by Christian principles ... [where people] accept the ideals of chastity, mercy, service, love.” Even if that were true when Barclay was writing, I doubt if many people would be so sure that it reflected 2019 Britain.

Recent events, especially as portrayed in the media, suggest that Britons might be more likely to be unfaithful, ruthless, selfish and self-centred. This might be exemplified in the bitter debate regarding Brexit, unresolved as I write. Little charity has been displayed between the protagonists, although, mercifully, demonstrations and events have been relatively peaceful. Entrenched positions on all sides have been raised to the status of idols.

John’s charge to us as Christians is to use the freedom given to us in Christ to strive to keep ourselves and the world from idolatry. Have we so striven? Or have we just acquiesced?

Prayer [2]

Before God, with the people of God,
we confess to our brokenness:
to the ways we wound our lives,
the lives of others and the life of the world

May God forgive you, Christ renew you,

And the spirit enable you to grow in love.
Amen.

[1] Daily Study Bible, William Barclay, The Letters of John and Jude,
Revised Edition 1976, Westminster Press

[2] Daily Office of the Iona Community

Tuesday 2nd July

The Rev'd Sarah Moore is a member of Carver Uniting Church,
Windermere, and is currently serving as President of the United
Reformed Church in Cumbria

Reading: 2 John 1: 1 - 3

The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth,
and not only I but also all who know the truth, because of the truth
that abides in us and will be with us for ever: Grace, mercy, and peace
will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's
Son, in truth and love.

Reflection

Since I first came across the short - only thirteen verses long - and
curious second letter of John, I have been intrigued about the identity
of 'the elect (or chosen) lady and her children'!

While some commentators do think that this does refer to an
individual family, more consider that this is a code where 'the lady'
represents a Church community, and 'the children' denotes its
individual members on the grounds that it seems unlikely at this stage
in Christian history that one family would have been so prominently
known.

wisdom when we disagree,
and persistence in love.
For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Demetrius (12), by contrast, is clearly someone John trusts. He may be one of the missionaries mentioned above. He may even be the person carrying the letter.

And the point of the letter? To persuade its recipient, Gaius, to give Demetrius and his team a friendly welcome and strong support. If Diotrephes has blocked their coming, John wants to make sure that this attitude won't spread. He feels he can depend on Gaius, and the letter is an attempt to make sure.

Behind the personalities are important issues. Mission is one: people who take the faith to new places do need support from the rest of us. Disagreement is another: conflict can be a growth point, but some church conflict damages people and blocks the spread of the faith; we need to be careful when we disagree. Tension between local congregation and wider church can be healthy too, if it helps us to listen to each other. But the attitude of Diotrephes, "who likes to put himself first" (9), will generally cause problems wherever it crops up.

Behind all of this is what the letter calls "the truth" (12). This is a theme in all three of John's letters. It centres on 'confessing Jesus', believing that his human life embodied the personal involvement and love of God. This belief shapes and sustains Christian fellowship. It holds us together, and motivates us to believe that difficulties and misunderstandings in church life are worth trying to overcome.

Prayer

God whose love is known in crucifixion,
teach us that truth matters more than ego,
fellowship more than pride,
your purpose more than our position.

God whose power is seen in resurrection,
teach us hope when we meet trouble,

I wonder what provoked the writer of 2 John to need to write in code? Reading the letter as a whole it would seem that this was written in a time when the Church was being persecuted and perhaps the 'false teachers' were not false in the sense that they were attempting to lead the faithful astray through suspect teaching but rather that they were spies from those persecuting the community posing as visiting teachers and preachers!

Codes have a long pedigree as a method of hiding messages. Arguably the last thing that today's Church needs or ought to be doing is working in code. If ever there was a need to speak plainly that is today. But different parts of the Church do use a certain code. I am aware in my ministry developing an ecumenical county with friends in other denominations that we each have our own shorthand and ways of speaking that seem normal to each but strange or even impenetrable to our friends. Different parts of the theological spectrum have different ways of speaking too. Perhaps we need to check ourselves to see if we are actually talking in code when really we need to speaking plainly? Do we think we are talking plainly - without jargon - but actually might as well be speaking in a different language as far as those outside the Church - the people we are yearning to reach - are concerned?

God of the elect lady and her children,
teach us how to speak plainly.
Plainly of you.
Plainly of the Good News taught by Jesus.
Plainly of the Good News of the Kingdom.
So that we might help others
see the way to be your disciples.
Help us to repent of our jargon
and to let go of the codes we use.
In the name of Jesus, Amen

Wednesday 3rd July

Verena Walder Lay Preacher and Elder Tabernacle URC, Mumbles.

Reading: 2 John 1: 4 - 6

I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father. But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, let us love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning—you must walk in it.

Reflection

I don't know about you, but I would have loved to have met this lady who is obviously highly respected by John, and entrusted to deliver his words of life and hope to her and her household. It might be possible that she was an older, more maternal character who had responsibility for lots of children. Perhaps she was a widow, but her life had been influential through her Christian faith which had touched the lives of at least some of her wards. On the other hand perhaps she was the host, or even one of the leaders of one of the churches which met in her house, something which happened much during the early days of the Church. Whoever she was she had made her mark in such a way that John feels it is worth mentioning here. He feels however, the need to endorse the new commandment of love which Jesus gave to them, by not just knowing the words themselves, but in walking in them. This is very needful for us all and easy though it is to say, or listen to in a sermon, the proof of our commitment as well as the truth in which we are believing, has to be seen to be evidenced by action. This is not an attitude that can be suddenly exhibited but one needs to walk in love which is genuine, deep in ones' spirit, working out not only on a Sunday when everyone else can see it, but day by day, even when life is not being loving towards us. As my Mother used to say to me, "It's

Saturday 6th July

The Revd John Proctor, member at Downing Place URC, Cambridge, and General Secretary of the URC

Reading: 3 John 1: 9 - 15

I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing in spreading false charges against us. And not content with those charges, he refuses to welcome the friends, and even prevents those who want to do so and expels them from the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. Everyone has testified favourably about Demetrius, and so has the truth itself. We also testify for him, and you know that our testimony is true. I have much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink; instead I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face. Peace to you. The friends send you their greetings. Greet the friends there, each by name.

Reflection

Short letter, long division?

This short letter highlights some painful tensions in church life. There are two names in today's verses, who never surface elsewhere in the Bible. All that we know about them is here, in and (to some extent hypothetically) between the lines.

Diotrephes (9) appears to be a local church leader, who does not want John, or anyone else, telling him what to do. He has stopped his congregation giving hospitality to travelling preachers whom John sent out. This has upset John, and he means to challenge Diotrephes – when he can get there to do so (10).

greetings. Early Christian letters were the kind of letters which people wrote to each other every day.

Some Christians from Gaius' region have reported to the author of Gaius' 'faithfulness to the truth'. We know nothing of Gaius except he was a lay person, a convert of the author's perhaps, (later tradition makes him bishop of Pergamum). Gaius is praised for his extraordinary hospitality offered to some itinerant Christians.

In our modern world we wouldn't claim hospitality as a mark of 'faithfulness to the truth'. But in the ancient world it was much more than offering an occasional meal. Here truth is integrated with love. This would include financial assistance as well as other support so that these missionaries might fulfil the vocation to which God has called them. The ancient practice of a local stipend as a living allowance to enable ministers to live does sound familiar!

The author's response to this situation is to rejoice and to urge Gaius to continue offering such hospitality. But the author is doing more than merely requesting Gaius show the same hospitality to the missionaries when they return. He is appealing to a broader principle: all people should be supported in this way. By giving such support, Christians like Gaius become 'co-workers in the truth' loyally living in Christian obedience. Can we make the same claim? To fulfil this responsibility is to play our part in 'spreading the truth' for it is both our Christian duty and an act of Christian love.

Welcoming God, whose love is boundless and whose compassion makes no distinction between friend and stranger,
grant us generosity of Spirit that we may faithfully walk in the truth.
Turn our indifference into hospitality
and our hard-heartedness into care
that we may participate as true co-workers in your kingdom. Amen.

not enough to say you will do something, but you must live it, and be it."

Prayer

Loving Saviour, who taught us the way of love,
Touch our hearts in a new and transforming way,
That we may not just speak the truth of such love,
But walk in it, work from it and share it
From our lives and hearts witnessing to the reality of that love,

Every day of every year that you grant us life.
Through the Name of Jesus, who is our example.
Amen.

Thursday 4th July

Linda Rayner - Elder at Bramhall URC, URC Coordinator for Fresh Expressions (fx) and fx Missioner at Cheadle Hulme Methodist

Reading: 2 John 1: 7 - 13

Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist! Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward. Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person. Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink; instead I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. The children of your elect sister send you their greetings.

Reflection

It's hardly surprising that the early Christians were victims of false and confused messages spread by the 'many deceivers' whom John mentions here. After all Christianity was new and the message of love, and a Kingdom where everyone looked after everyone else, was utterly counter-cultural. It was fertile ground for the heretics who spread inaccurate stories about the new religion. Maybe I'm being generous by suggesting the heretics thought what they said was indeed true Christianity.

Perhaps more surprising is that little has changed. In the 21st Century there are people who speak as Christians and claim that their faith prevents them from engaging with sections of society, that it means they condemn other people and lifestyles, or makes them behave in certain ways. They often preface their views by stating that they speak on behalf of Christianity. The difficult bit for me, is that they believe what they say.

John is very clear in this passage; we must not let these people into the house, which seems quite harsh to us today. However, in the 1st Century missionaries relied hand-to-mouth for a living, on the hospitality of Christians; and if as a Christian you hosted a missionary, it indicated that you shared that missionary's views. Hence in a culture where hospitality was crucial, John said don't offer anything! John was urging the early Christians to speak out and act against people who preached anything other than God's love. He encouraged people to love and care for one another as Christ did before. For 21st Century disciples, the message of John's second letter is still spot-on: we must speak out against those who say Jesus's love is exclusive of any sections of society, and most of all, we must share that message of a Kingdom of love - with everyone. No exceptions.

Prayer

Lord Jesus
we know your love is all-encompassing
and we pray that you will walk with us
sharing the times when we struggle
to stand up for what we know to be right.
Help us Lord, to spread the message
of your love for everyone to everyone Amen

Friday 5th July

The Rev'd Nicola Furley-Smith, Moderator of Southern Synod
Reading: 3 John 1: 1 - 8

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely, how you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth. Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the friends, even though they are strangers to you; they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God; for they began their journey for the sake of Christ, accepting no support from non-believers. Therefore we ought to support such people, so that we may become co-workers with the truth.

Reflection:

With the advent of the email have we lost the art of letter writing? In 3 John we have the briefest of openings to an Epistle typical of a secular letter of its time: first the greeting, next the prayer for good health, after that the main body of the letter with its news, and then final