

2 John 4-6 Truth and Love
Tim Anderson 31/10/21

Life is pretty mobile these days.

Once upon a time you were most likely
to be born, grow up, work, and die in the same town.

I don't know too many people like that today.

I've lived in Sandringham, Launceston, Brunswick,
Prahran, Healesville and Hastings.

Some of you might have lived in more places than I have.

One of the things about our mobile society
is that you occasionally get to hear news
about places that you used to call home.

In 2016, we took a holiday down in Tasmania,
at caught up with some friends

who went to our church while we were down there.

And inevitably, you get chatting about the other people that you knew.

Who's got married, who's had babies, who's been divorced,
who has moved away and we don't know where they are,
and who has died.

And for the Christian, there's another very important who's done what.

Who has continued in the faith?

For Cherida and I,

it was super to catch up with Matt Petrie and his wife Naomi.

Matt had been part of a Bible Study I had led in 1996-97.

I moved back to Victoria.

I hadn't really kept up with him.

What was he doing 20 years later?

He'd married Naomi.

They'd had three children.

And the family was going really strongly in the faith.

It was such an encouragement.

That's where John begins in the verses I want to consider today.

1:4 "It has given me great joy

to find some of your children walking in the truth,

just as the Father has commanded us."
John has had a leadership role in this church.
But in the ancient world,
it's not possible to simply ring up and find out how things are going.
He has responsibilities with other churches.
It may well be that he'd spent time exiled on the Isle of Patmos.
So there's been a period of time
that he's not been able to keep up with this church.
But now, he's heard about them.
And he has great joy that some of their members
are walking in the truth.

Walking in the truth
is his way of saying continuing in the Christian faith.
As we spoke about last week,
the truth is not any old truth.
It's not like they are being commended for telling the truth,
or living with integrity.
Those are great things to do.
But this walking in the truth is walking in the truth of the gospel.
Walking in the truth that the eternal Son of God came to earth,
that he was born of a poor virgin named Mary,
that he taught the truth of God in such a way,
that the religious leaders of the day were outraged,
his teaching exposed their sinful hearts as it does yours and mine,
he died as a willing victim,
the righteous for the unrighteous,
he was raised a mighty conqueror,
and he will return to restore the whole creation,
renewing everything that was spoiled by the sin of Adam,
including raising those who have died in the faith
to share in the new life that he now enjoys at the Father's side.
That's the truth they have been walking in.
How do you walk in that truth?
Well most obviously and the right place to start

is you continue to believe it.
It's amazing how many people you meet
who drift away from the believing the truth.
Sometimes that's because they can't deal with the ridicule
of those who sneer at the truth.
Or they want the approval of those
who regard believers in the truth as simpletons.
But most often it's not about an intellectual problem,
it's about a moral problem.
Walking in the truth does mean that you continue to believe it.
But that's only a start.
The truth of the gospel
is not some abstract truth disconnected from your life.
The truth of the gospel also tells you how to live.
Jesus had lots to say about how to live.
And some of what he said
is the most difficult to follow instruction you are likely to hear.
Love your enemies.
Turn the other cheek.
Take the log out of your own eye
before removing the speck from your neighbour's.
Walking in the truth means believing
that Jesus did all that was written about him,
and living in accordance with what Jesus taught.
None of us can do that perfectly,
but Christians are having a go,
relying on the power of the Holy Spirit.

But only some of the members of the church John was writing to
were continuing to walk in the truth.
Why did some stop?
Because so often people want to do something
that they know conflicts with what Jesus taught.
So they stop believing because that's the only way
they can take the path they have decided that they want to take.

It's sometimes to do with choosing a life partner.
I've know many people give up the faith
because they wanted to marry a non Christian.
In this case, there's usually there's a gap
between when they stop practicing their faith
and when they say they aren't Christians anymore.
Better to be single and go to heaven than married and go to hell.
Some people give up when they want to misbehave sexually.
You know the stereotype.
The secretary is younger and prettier than the wife.
I don't believe that Christian stuff anymore.
How convenient.
No one is telling me I can't ditch my wife anymore.
And 'Love is Love' after all
and I'm in love.
I can feel it right between my legs.
It's tragic when that happens.
And I've seen it happen.
I've seen it happen to ministers.
They stopped walking in the truth.
Sex is the number one reason people stop walking in the truth.
But money and lifestyle would be a close second.
You're a solid committed walker in the truth of the gospel.
But then you move house.
In the vicinity of your new house are wonderful beaches
and a river you can go fishing and waterskiing in.
Your kids can join the local surf lifesaving program.
And really it's quite hard to motivate yourself to join a new church.
It's tough to even try them out in the middle of a pandemic.
It's just not the same on Zoom.
Maybe you'll get around to it when things open up.
But maybe not too.
The fishing, the waterskiing, the surfing they are great family activities.
And you are working six days a week
to fund the mortgage on the new house.

Your wife has to work shifts some Sundays as a nurse.
 You're not taking the kids to church on your own.
 How long before this guy says he's not a Christian anymore?
 He's already not walking in the truth.

Those kind of stories are depressing.
 But John has the right focus.

1:4 "It has given me great joy
 to find some of your children walking in the truth,
 just as the Father has commanded us."

He's going to focus on the positives.
 Let's think about the ones who keep going,
 year after year.

The ones who stick it out
 through all kinds of tough times and disappointments.
 We have in our church survivors of clergy sexual abuse.
 They are still walking in the truth.

Praise God!

We have people
 who have survived unfaithfulness
 on the part of their "Christian" spouse.
 And they are still walking in the truth.
 People who have lost children to suicide,
 had businesses go bankrupt,
 had their health taken from them due to sickness or accident,
 and they are still walking in the truth.
 That's where we want to focus our thinking.
 On the great joy we have because some are walking in the truth.

Well for those who are walking in the truth,
 John has a command.

1:5 "And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command,
 but one that we have had from the beginning.

I ask that we love one another."

It's amazing how perspectives on newness change,

isn't it?

I am old enough to remember
when the CD was a revolutionary step forward.

The days of cassettes with the reel of tape
getting chewed up by the player
and destroying your music forever were over.

And the quality of the sound.

No more dull hiss.

Now when you buy a new car,
there won't even be a place to put CDs in the stereo system
because they will presume
you are going to play music through your phone
connected by bluetooth.

And you kids will complain blue murder if you try to do that.

You should have your own ear buds in,
so we can all listen to our own music.

Why should everyone in the car have to listen to the same thing?

What was once new becomes old if you give it a while.

And so it is with the new command.

When John was writing his gospel, he said this,

Jn 13:34, "A new command I give you: Love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

As Jesus was speaking, it was a new command.

How do we love?

The way he has loved us.

With the sacrificial love that would give up his life for his friends.

But as John speaks to the church in this letter,

it's not a new command anymore.

They have had this command from the day they became Christians.

From the very beginning of their lives as Christians.

It's no longer a new command,

but one that they've had from the beginning.

It's newness might have worn off.

But it's still just as important.

One big thing John wants from the church is that they love each other.

It's a big theme for John right through his writings.

In his first letter he says this.

1 Jn 4:7-10 "Dear friends, let us love one another,
for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God,
because God is love.

This is how God showed his love among us:

He sent his one and only Son into the world
that we might live through him.

This is love:

not that we loved God,

but that he loved us

and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

We are to love one another.

It's an outworking of the gospel.

God sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice.

That was love.

If God loves like that,

then we who follow him must love in the same way."

I've said it a number of times to Geoff Stockton.

The people who turned the church around on the side 30 years ago
did a wonderful service to Holy Trinity.

It's so much better to be facing this way,
rather than sitting in a long thin building
with the minister way up the front.

Why is that?

It's because this way the building itself emphasises
that we are a community called to love one another.

Back in the day of long thin church buildings,
people came to church to do their business with God.

They might sit in the same pew for 20 years,
and not even know the person who sat in the pew in front of them.

They came along.

They sung some hymns.
They listened to a sermon.
They said their prayers.
And they went home again.
And it never registered that they were part of a Christian community.
There were no home groups in those days.
It was you, the minister and God.
John knows nothing of that sort of Christianity.
He says, "I ask that we love one another."
When you put the church around this way,
people mingle more freely.
It feels like more of a community.
And that's because it should be.
The church is the body of Christ.
That's all of us together.

You know sometimes I get these plaintiff comments.
"I was sick and the church didn't visit me."
Thankfully not so much during the last six months
because people registered that there was a lockdown happening.
But it's a common enough occurrence.
But when the conversation continues,
you find out that actually
a number of people from church had visited them when they were sick.
Others had rung them up.
So why are they complaining?
Well it turns out that 'the church didn't visit me' is actually code for
'the minister didn't visit me'.
They are still living in the 'it's me, the minister and God' world.
But actually, 'it's you, the body of Christ and God'.
If someone from the church has visited you,
then the church has visited you.
That person is part of the body of Christ.
They are the church.
And they visited you.

If you are sick and you get a visit from me,
that's bad news, not good news.
It means I think you might be dying.
Well maybe it's good news.
It means you might get to see Jesus face to face sooner rather than later.
But most people think that dying is bad news.
And from what I've seen,
it's usually not much fun.

Let me emphasise.
John knows nothing of a Christianity that is you the minister and God.
He says, "I ask that we love one another."
And what John wants you to be asking yourself is not,
"Who ought to be showing love to me?"
He wants you to ask,
"To whom ought I be showing love?"
The people who clamour about how nobody loves them
are so often the people who never ring anyone up
but complain that no one rings them.
They never invite anyone around to dinner
but complain that no one ever invites them.
John says, "I ask that we love one another."
That's a call to think about who you could be showing love to.

But what is love?
Our contemporary society has provided us a very helpful definition.
Not.
"Love is love".
That tells you a precise total of nothing.
If I tell you a football is a football,
that tells you nothing if you don't know what a football is.
But 'love is love' is more than a truism.
It's actually an attempt to manipulate.
What they really mean when they say it is,
"Love is anything I say it is,

and you have no right to argue if you disagree."
 It's an attempt to stifle dissent.
 What does John say love is?
 1:6 "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands."
 Love is obeying God's commands.
 I've preached on three verses today.
 The word command appears four times in three verses.
 It seems strange to us
 for love and command to be pair together.
 But it's not strange actually.
 How does a soldier show that he loves his country?
 By obeying the commands of his superior officer.
 In the Christian faith,
 Jesus is your superior officer.
 He's so much superior that the analogy is actually broken.
 But it's still true.
 If you want to show love,
 you do what Jesus tells you to.

This is something Jesus himself emphasised in John's gospel.
 Jn 14:15 "If you love me, keep my commands."
 Jn 14:21 "Whoever has my commands and keeps them
 is the one who loves me.
 The one who loves me will be loved by my Father,
 and I too will love them and show myself to them."
 Jn 15:10 "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love,
 just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."

Why does Jesus tie love and keeping his commands so tightly together?
 Because it's actually very hard to know what love is.
 All of us have a natural inclination to deciding
 that love is what makes me feel good.
 Parents say, "I love my child,
 so I could never discipline them."
 And the child turns out to be out of control.

But you see,
the parent mistook their inclination to avoid hard work for love.
Or they've decided that love could never make another person upset.
Of course your child will be upset if you discipline them.
But if you love them you will do it anyway.
And later they will thank you for it.

It's really hard to know what love is.
But Jesus tells us very clearly how to work it out.
This is love.
That we walk in obedience to God's commands.
That's how we love God.
And his command is that we love each other.
To be loving you obey his commands.
What does he command?
That you be loving.

Two things we are called to in today's passage.
Joy and Love.
Joy when we find people walking in the truth.
Love towards our Christian brothers and sisters.
Let's pray for joy and love.