

"Hope In Jesus"

Text: I John 3: 1-3

5/12/2019

Would you describe your lives as being full of hope? Do you hope for the future? All of us as Christians do hope for the future; our lives are full of hope in Jesus. Let me show you what I mean ...

We begin by returning to today's Epistle, where we hear again the apostle John say:

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."(1 John 3: 1a)

That's quite a statement, and it's one that would've been important for John's first listeners to hear ...

You see, John wrote this letter to Christians living in the city of Ephesus and the surrounding region of Asia-Minor, a region here John had served as pastor and leader of the Church. John wrote this letter probably sometime in the last decade of the first century (early-mid '90s)~ Ephesus was large and rather cosmopolitan for its time. It was a worldly place. The religious scene in Ephesus was likely dominated by the idolatrous practices of the time, which combined the cults of various gods and goddesses together with the cult of Rome, which centered on worship of the Emperor/Caesar. Those cults were driven by the teaching of the philosopher Plato, which said that the material form of something was a mere shadow of its more perfect form which existed in the immaterial "eternal world of ideal forms." In plain English, Plato taught a kind of dualism that said spirit was good and matter was bad (or at least lesser than).

Now, because of the dominance of that particular philosophy, some of the early Christians in the church of Ephesus were offended by the teaching of the historical Jesus - i.e., the notion that Jesus was God in the flesh / God having joined Himself to the material) historical world. That way of thinking - we call it incarnational thinking - was at odds with everything else they believed, and because of that many of the Christians in Ephesus left the church there. When John wrote his letters! to the Ephesian Christians (3 letters in all), he wrote to encourage them and build them up, for they were experiencing a time of difficulty, a time when many of their members had left them. John wrote to them, in essence, to say: cheer up; don't lose heart; have hope; just ...

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

Those words: "and so we are," underscore the point that what God calls us is what we are, regardless of how things seem to be. God says in His Word that we're His children, and since He says it, "so we are," John says. We, along with the believers of 1st century Ephesus, are children of God, by faith in His Son. God says it, and that's that. End of story.

But it's NOT the end of John's story, as he goes on to write in terms that call to mind for us what we often refer to as "the now and the not yet" - that particular teaching of our faith that says that even though we are God's children now, the fullness of that is not yet enjoyed by us because it has not yet been revealed. John says:

"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared (or been revealed or manifested); but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is."(v.2) 5

There's a lot in that verse ... 1) There's the word "beloved," which hearkens back to the love of the Father from the first verse, and reminds us that we're loved by God; it also expresses John's love for the people to whom he's writing - since they're loved by God, they're loved by him also. 2) There's the whole now/not yet motif in the middle; 3) There's also the promise that we will one day be like Jesus, on the Day when we finally get to "see Him as He is." 4) There's also the certainty of knowing by faith, as John says that "we know" when He appears we will be like Him.

That phrase "we know" stands in contrast to the world's NOT knowing back in v.1. I skipped over that but I shouldn't have, because it speaks to the difficulty those Christians in Ephesus were facing. Remember, they had had many of their fellow-members leave their church because they thought they knew Better about the things of God (that He's spirit, not material in the flesh of Jesus). What John says is that those folks did not know what they were talking about, or in the words of today's Epistle:

"They reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him."(v.1b)

Those folks who left the Ephesian church did not know Jesus; they did not know God's love, present for them *in the flesh* of His Son.

"But you do know Him," John says to those early Christians in Ephesus; "you know Him, and on the Day He comes again you'll even be like Him." On the Day Jesus comes again we'll all enjoy our status of being God's children to the full, because when Jesus comes again we're all going to be like Him. In spite of who's left us or whatever else makes us feel like failures, we're not failures as we continue to trust in Jesus - the One Who took all our failures on Himself, answered for them all in His death, and overcame them once and for all in His resurrection from the dead.

John finishes today's Epistle by writing

"Everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies Himself as He is pure."(v.3)

Everyone who looks forward to seeing Jesus on the Last Day, and to being made like Him can rejoice in what it means to be children of God. Everyone who looks forward to seeing Jesus on the Last Day has hope - hope that there's more to life than what simply meets the eye in this life; hope that even when feeling like a failure as a church, we're actually very successful folks, we're exactly what God wants us to be in His Son, and therein is our hope. We hope! in Jesus.

One of the themes for this day in the Church Year is joy- from the Latin: Jubilate; "Shout for joy to God, all the earth," it says in today's Introit. That's one thing that hope gives us: joy. We who hope in Jesus are joyful. Jesus even says in today's Gospel:

" ... you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."(John 16:22)

That's the joy of our sins being forgiven. It's the joy of being able to forgive one another, and love one another. It's the joy of knowing that, even as we are children of God now, we will one day enjoy life as His children to the full, forever, even after our deaths. It's a joy to know God as Father in the face of His Son/ our Brother: Jesus. In that/Him is our hope. No matter what all is going wrong around us, we have hope -hope in Jesus.

My dear friends in Christ, I don't know all of your struggles of faith, but I do know you have them. Everybody does. We certainly have our share of struggles as a congregation. So I say to you what John said to the Ephesian congregation:

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

Cheer up; don't lose heart; hope in Jesus. In Him - by virtue of Holy Baptism into His name -you are God's children, and with Him in you - by virtue of Holy Communion with His Body & Blood - you are guaranteed to rise again, after death, to live forever.

Baptism and Holy Communion both go on in this place, and by them the love of the Father is given to you, calling you His children. As God's children you know that death is not the end, and the discouragements of this life pale in comparison with the joy that awaits. So hope, hope in Jesus -

- in His ✠ Name,

Amen!