

Sunday 16th May, 7th Sunday of Easter – 1 John 5:1-13 ‘The Witnesses of Love’

So we come to the last in our series in the first letter of John – and perhaps it’s not so much saving the best till last, as saving the hardest till last. It all starts easily enough, but then about halfway through St. John starts going on about water and blood – and I bet most of you were thinking: what’s that all about? Well, hopefully I’ll be able to give you some sort of explanation, but let’s start with the easy bit first.

In the first part of the reading, John is drawing to a close, and takes the chance to draw together the key themes of his lovely letter, written to encourage us to hold fast to our faith even in challenging times. He starts by reminding us that Jesus is the way to God, and **those who believe in Jesus are born of God** – just as Jesus said to Nicodemus in the third chapter of John’s gospel.

Next, he reminds us that **the way we show our love for God is by loving our sisters and brothers** – v3 ‘this is love for God: to keep his commands.’ And John adds the reassuring insight that to do this is ‘not burdensome’ – which again echoes the beautiful teaching of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel, one of the most treasured verses in all of Scripture, that his ‘yoke is easy and his burden is light’, because obedience to Jesus is ultimately based on love not laws.

Finally, in this section, John reminds us that **believing in Jesus and living in his love carries great authority** – v4 ‘everyone born of God overcomes the world’ – in other words because Jesus carries all the authority of the universe, being in Christ is the way to overcome all the challenges that life throws at us.

So far, so good. But then John moves on to the difficult section talking about the things which testify to the truth and reality of Jesus – which he names as the Spirit, the water and the blood. He calls these God’s testimony – and the first one is straightforward. As we look forward to celebrating Pentecost next Sunday, we are reminded that, for all followers of Jesus, receiving God’s Spirit and experiencing the Spirit’s transforming power is proof of Jesus’ victory. For us to be able to walk with the presence of God in our lives through his Spirit is indeed one of the great testimonies of the Christian life.

But what about the water and the blood? Well, there are lots of theories about this, but to my mind the most straightforward is to take these as references to **two of the pivotal events in Jesus’ life – his baptism and then his crucifixion**. When he was baptised in water by John we are told that the Spirit came upon him and the voice from heaven declared: ‘this is my beloved Son.’ In other words, here we have direct testimony from God that Jesus is divine, he is God come to this earth.

Then, as Jesus shed his blood three years later, the sky turned dark, and ultimately the centurion at his side declared: ‘Surely this is the Son of God.’ Again, direct testimony as to who Jesus was and what he did. So these events of water and blood in Jesus life are God’s testimony as to just how great a Saviour Jesus is. Add the Spirit, which then comes to live in us, and here are 3 great witnesses to faith in Christ. As John says – human testimony is good, but these testimonies are eternal.

So these are the divine testimonies – but let's also note that John also refers to human testimony. And if the life of Jesus and the pouring out of the Spirit are always the greatest testimonies to Jesus, John also shows that there is great value in human testimony too. In fact, John brilliantly simplifies human testimony in v11, something we can all share with people that we know and love: **'This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.'**

If you were to boil the essence of faith down to its kernels what would you say? John's answer perhaps isn't the only answer you could give, but it's very good nonetheless. Firstly, he declares that **we are all made for eternity**. Deep down we all have a sense that this life is not all there is. In Western culture we've kind of forgotten that over the last couple of generations, and perhaps this last year has given us a stark and sobering reminder of what most other cultures have to accept as a daily reality.

But if we have this hope of eternity in our hearts, where is this hope to be satisfied? This is our good news – as John says, 'this life is in God's Son.' **Jesus is the source not just of love, but of life itself.**

This week it was my privilege to take the funeral of a dear Christian brother, who finished his race, and ran it well. He had a long and good life, but as we gathered on Tuesday – yes, there was loss and grief, and many will carry that grief in their hearts for some time to come: but I also had that strong sense, as I did at my mum's funeral that Jesus makes all the difference. When we declare that Jim has gone to a better place, we really believe that. 'God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.'

So as I close, in the midst of this short season when many of us are praying for 5 people we love to draw closer to Jesus' love, let's pray for confidence too to be able to share this simple message, one which has changed our lives and one we can all offer to those around us – there is the hope of eternal life for anyone, and this life is to be found in Jesus. Amen.