

## My Lord and my God

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, April 11, 2010)

I John 1:1 - 2:2 <sup>1</sup>We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—<sup>2</sup>this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—<sup>3</sup>we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; <sup>7</sup>but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. <sup>1</sup>My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup>and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 20:19-31 <sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” <sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” <sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” <sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Which is the greater statement, the one many of us used to greet one another last week, saying: “Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!” or could it be the response that Thomas made when he saw Jesus and said, “**My Lord and My God!**”?

Maybe another way to ask this question is to put it into the context of our worship. Which is the more important festival, Easter, or the week after Easter? Well, I guess we can see by our church attendance which one many folks perceive as more important. But I would like to ask if Easter really makes any difference to us, unless we, like Thomas, confess that Jesus Christ is “My Lord and my God.”

Almost every year Thomas is the focus of Scripture on the Sunday after Easter. And there is something about Thomas that really resonates with us, even though Thomas lived nearly 2000 years ago. We like to see and touch. Often we believe only what we can see, so I guess Thomas should be a man after our own hearts.

But so should John be a man after our own hearts. Listen again to the powerful way he opens his letter: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.” He writes about hearing, seeing and touching the Lord, but now notice how it makes a big difference for John.

First is the recognition that we are sinners, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Sometimes the secular world understands this better than we do in the church. The novelist, James Joyce, tells the story that when he was young and struggling to make ends meet, he tried to get a job in a bank. The bank manager turned the interview into a real grilling: “Do you smoke?” “No.” “Do you drink?” “No.” “Do you go out with girls?” “No.” “Away with you! You’d probably rob the bank.” I guess he thought that if James Joyce didn’t do any of the first three things, since everyone has sinned, he probably would do the fourth and rob the bank.

It is true, it is universally true, that every one of us have our faults and shortcomings, every one of us have made mistakes. Sometimes we rationalize our sins and errors. Sometimes we hide and ignore our faults, but they don’t go away. Just as words, once spoken, cannot be put back into your mouth, so sins don’t go away if you just try to turn your back on them.

But then, John proclaims, through Christ we are forgiven, and therefore we walk in the light. Walking in the light does not make us perfect. We are still human. We still make errors, we still have shortcomings, we still sin. But God is more faithful in forgiveness that we are stubborn in sinfulness. So maybe we have to look for a deeper understanding of what happens to us in forgiveness that makes it so central in John’s letters. John tells us, in verse 7, **“Walking in the light gives us fellowship with Christ, and with one another.”** Our fellowship with one another, in the name of Christ, becomes the presence of God with us, a presence that we can see and hear and touch. Could this be John’s understanding of what happens when God forgives us, that we have fellowship with God, AND WITH ONE ANOTHER?

Sometimes the John’s letters are hard to fully understand. I have often said that John reflected on the impact of Jesus in his life, and his Gospel and his letters seem to have a more developed theology than many of the other writers. John, in this letter, begins with this strong declaration, “We declare to you what we have seen, what we have heard, what we have touched.” It is only natural to think that John is talking about Jesus, as he walked on this earth, or he might be referring to some of the resurrection appearances, as we read in his Gospel. But this letter was written later than the Gospel, much later. Some scholars even suggest it was not written by the disciple John, but by another John, a devoted friend, writing in a style to emulate John the disciple. But even if it was written by John the beloved disciple, it was written many years after Christ’s resurrection. Could John be writing with such passion and conviction about a distant memory, or is there something more current and personal in his mind? Remember, this is a letter of encouragement to the churches. John speaks powerfully about his love for the churches, the fellowship in Christ, not only in this opening, but throughout his letter. In fact, Paul’s teaching about the church being “the body of Christ” is present in John’s letter, but in different words. It is quite likely that John is SEEING and HEARING and TOUCHING - - the CHURCH, which is the body of Christ.

Of course, John recognizes the sinfulness of this earthly body of Christ, a body of believers made up entirely of sinful men and women. John’s churches, any church, even this church, is but a poor reflection of our Lord, but it is still the body of Christ. It is we, who have fellowship with one another, and with Christ, we are the ones who are called to be walking in the light, and we are the ones who are seen and heard and touched in the world today. John may also have remembered the time Philip asked Jesus to “show us the father.” Philip, like Thomas, wanted some proof. Jesus’ response at that time, which we can easily interpret to have a note of exasperation in it, was, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the father.”

The same can be said for any who would want to see Jesus. Do you want to see Jesus? Look at these Christian people, how they love one another, how they are patient with one another, how they support one another in times of illness, grief and hardship. Look at how they reach out to the hungry, the homeless, those in need of clothes. Look at how they support people they never met, through OCWM, through monthly missions. In all these things, in spite of the inherent sinful nature of the body and its members, can’t you see and hear and touch our Lord Jesus?

OK, our church is not perfect. Peace United Church of Christ is not God, or even God’s Son. But when we are doing what is right, and good, and loving, then don’t you see it, can you not see Christ in us?

May you understand John’s beautiful vision of the church as the body of Christ, may you hear the words of Christ whenever you gather here, may you see with your own eyes, may you touch with your own hands, but most important, may we all exclaim, with Thomas, that Jesus is **“My Lord, and my God!”**