

Live in the light

Evensong sermon by the Rev Derek Lightbourne June 12 2016

Keynote Bible passages: 1 John 2.29 – 3.9, John 17. 5 – 19

Coming as we are at Evensongs this year to the first letter of John, I am mindful of key themes running through his letter. The first would be of love: 'Beloved let us love one another, for love is of God.' A second is that of light and darkness: 'God is light and in him is no darkness at all.' A third is the number of statements of 'black and white' – 'if we say we have fellowship with God while walking in the darkness, we lie and do not do what is true.' Then fourthly and especially tonight's theme is of our *relationship with God – as 'God's children'*. The author of the letter was likely to be the apostle John as at the beginning of the letter he writes of 'what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.' It has to be said that some bible scholars consider the letter is the work of a disciple of the apostle John. Whichever, the writer speaks with the authority of one who is a father in God to the people who are addressed – namely the believers. John calls his readers to live a 'Christ-like life' and hence my sermon is entitled '*live in the light.*'

- 1) So let's consider the passage more closely, beginning at chapter 2.29. We first see it is written in the *context of the background being 'end-times'*, that awareness that the world could end and Christ come again. Thus 'Little children, abide in Christ, so that when he is revealed, we may have confidence and not to be put to shame at his coming. ' It has to be acknowledged that there was much more awareness then of the likely end than we have today. It has to be said that Adventist churches have this concern more than the average Anglican worshipper. Along the road from where we live there is a Christadelphian church and their publicity board frequently has texts about aspects of today in context with biblical prophecy of judgement and Christ's coming again. Indeed I recall attending a wedding at one of their churches and instead of the vow being...'till death us do part' it was ...till Jesus come again. So where do we stand in the context of end-times? One could argue that we are closer than we like to think. One only has to consider earthquakes, famines, floods and other natural calamities today look to be getting more severe and so many are affected. Climate change could also be a factor as the warming of the atmosphere seems to be causing stronger storms, as we saw a couple of weeks ago with that thunderstorm overnight. In Wellington these thankfully are rare, but it was a reminder we are just as vulnerable. Thus the message of John is how important it is to live in the way of Jesus – 'abide in him' (which recalls similar teaching in John's gospel directly from Jesus.) For me in responding to this, I try to do my bit toward care of creation, not wasting, re-using and recycling where possible. I'm mindful also that my new car is much more fuel-efficient than previous vehicles. Furthermore there's a sense of the prophetic, in sermons to alert the hearers to what you as I might be doing to sustain the life of the Planet.

- 2) Secondly, the passages focusses on *the relationship we have as God's children* with God. John says that this derives from God's love: 'See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.'

This is surely a great privilege and to know we are incorporated into this relationship. John's awareness is that 'children of the world' who do not know Christ cannot appreciate such a relationship. The message of evangelism is to bring the love of Christ to others. Many methods have been tried over the years, and some more successful than others. I remember years ago attending a Billy Graham Crusade and that was effective for its times as large stadiums were filled – with believers and inquirers. I doubt if that would be effective today. Nowadays it is more likely that social media convey a message, and I sure see this on Facebook. Frequently there's posts with a Christian message, for example about love and forgiveness, and showing mercy to the poor. Also I'm a believer in '*friendship evangelism*' – that is the Christian love and concern we show toward friends, and in other contexts. This is by example and by our words of kindness and encouragement. Our focus and message is that we might show forth God's love, as we understand and experience it. There's a further aspect we are promised as we live this way, it's a preparation now, for that time we will more clearly see Christ at such time as he is revealed:

'When he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.' How does that apply? Both in the present and trusting for the future. I'm mindful of the song: 'We find thee Lord in other's needs, we see thee in our brothers (and sisters). ...' How do we know this love? It is by what we see in our relationships – in church community is one place where we seek especially to live this way.

3) A third motif in John is of *righteousness* – of living in the light. 'If we walk in the light as Christ is in the light we have fellowship with one another'. The alternative he writes is of 'living in darkness', no shades of grey, he is quite definite. This black and white distinction I have to say doesn't fit easily for me. There are many lovely caring considerate people in the world who are not Christian believers. We all know ones like this. Some are no doubt in our own families. So how do we come to terms with John's assessment? Here I believe we need to consider the context of his writing. It was a world where one was either a believer or a pagan worshipper and likely opposed to the Christian message. Hence the periodic persecutions that took place. Through this the believers stayed true to their conviction. I noted from the recent documentary on History Channel 'From Christ to Constantine' that the commentator attributes the remarkable growth of Christianity to the fact that Christians cared for one another. Today it has to be said that there are ones in the world who appear to be motivated by evil and violence and don't seem to discriminate who they kill, especially taking Isis and related groups into account. In such context John expresses the gravity of sin – of those who oppose God. Such align themselves with the 'man of lawlessness' and as John would write, commit themselves to the work of the devil. This is directed not only toward people but also toward objects of beauty and historical significance – for example the remnants of Palmyra in the Syrian desert. The city was on the Silk route and dates back 2000 years before Christianity.

In summary then the message of John is that Christians are to 'live in the light', living in the light of Christ.' St Paul likewise used this imagery as he wrote to the Thessalonians affirming the believers: 'You are all children of light and children of the day.' We have considered this in contemporary context, are called to this relationship of obedience to God living as we do in arguably end-times.