

Date: April 24, 2022 (Easter 2)

1. Texts: Acts 5:27-32; Ps. 118:14-29; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31.
2. Subject: genuine faith.
3. Topic: life in and through Christ.
4. Aim: educate, provoke.
5. Proposition: "Being genuinely alive means living in Christ Jesus."

TRUE LIFE, NOT JUST LIVING

John's Gospel promises us life in the name of Jesus. It's worth exploring.

But these [signs] 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.¹

Having life in Jesus' name is clearly different than being alive. Everyone reading John's words is already alive. John must have meant something different, just as when Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."² Jesus clearly meant something other than just being alive.

It's interesting, really. Here, at the end of his Gospel, John is repeating a theme that he introduced at its beginning.

What has come into being in [the Word] was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.³

John equated life and light, and he clearly meant something more than just being alive and more than just illumination.

In this Gospel, Jesus is genuine life and true light. Jesus didn't *live* the life of God: he *was* the life of God. He didn't follow the pattern and model of God's life: he was God's life that is our pattern and model.

Jesus didn't live according to the light of God: he was God's light. He didn't shine God's light upon our path: he was the light of God to guide our journey.

¹ John 20:31.

² John 10:10.

³ John 1:3c-5.

At the end of John's Gospel, the author repeated the theme that he established at its beginning. Genuine life is to be found in Christ. Authentic light to shine upon our path is to be experienced in Christ. It is only *in* Christ that we experience what God truly intended life to be. It is only *through* Christ that we can gain the insight into that life.

No wonder our worship seems so trivial to outsiders: they do not have the necessary relationship to be able to access the life and light of Christ. No wonder so much of our evangelism seems to bear little fruit: we assume that others have at least a framework through which to begin to experience Jesus.

But the spiritual reality is that it is only when we have an existential, meaningful and transforming relationship with Christ that we can experience the quality of genuine life which God intends for all humanity. It is only through this relationship of love, trust, self-sacrifice and surrender that we call "faith" that we can see Christ's life as our model and goal.

That's what John meant when he wrote, "...that through *believing* you may have *life in his name*." Believing is the action that places us in the faith relationship with Jesus. That faith relationship gives us access to God's genuine life.

Living that genuine life in the here and now results in eternal life in the hereafter. Being truly and authentically alive—because we are living the life God intended us to live—opens up the pathway to eternal life in the presence of God. Living God's life here places us in God's life there.

With this Christian certainty placed before us, you can see why Christianity is an evangelizing faith. Judaism, for example, is not. Jews believe that, as long as you are doing what God would have you do—however you arrive at that place—you are acceptable. So non-Jews doing God's work are accepted by God. Christianity says otherwise.

Christianity says, "You have to live the life of God here to experience the life of God in the hereafter. You can only live the life of God if you have a faith relationship with Jesus who is God on earth." Living the authentic life of God now can only be done in relationship with Jesus. That's why Christians are committed to sharing that relationship with other people. Christianity is an evangelizing faith.

The energy and force behind our evangelism is not adherence to some suggestion. The energy and force behind our evangelism is love.

[Jesus] said to [the lawyer], ‘ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”⁴

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.⁵

‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.⁶

We point the way to genuine life and light in Christ because we love God and love others. In fact, evangelism is a necessary expression of love if we are living in the abundant life and light of Christ.

The problem with this dynamic of love is that the Church hasn't always been loving in its evangelism. Yes, the Church has always been motivated by the fact that Christianity is an evangelizing faith. But the methods of our evangelism must always—and I mean *ALWAYS*—reflect the love, light and life of Christ into which we seek to call people. But this hasn't always been the case.

The Crusades prove that the Church has abandoned the love, light and life of Christ in its evangelism. The residential school system in Canada proves the same. The use of guilt as a motivator is contrary to the command of God. In its

⁴ Matthew 22:37-39.

⁵ John 13:34.

⁶ John 15:12.

urgent desire to bring people into the faith, the Church has frequently failed to be the life and light desired by God.

This truth about the Church and its history indicates⁷ our future path, a path away from our past.

First, we must *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That is, we choose to reaffirm our life-transforming relationship with God through Jesus, a relationship of love, trust, self-sacrifice and surrender. Believing is the action through which we enter into the faith relationship with God.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty... We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God...⁸

Through this choice, we renew the decision to have genuine life in the name of Christ.

Then, we live the genuine life of Christ in the here and now according to the light of Christ which we receive from scripture, tradition and reason.

Lastly, we carry the life and light of Christ to others in ways that reflect God and his self-sacrificing love for us.

This is what it means to be genuinely alive in Christ. This is Christ's abundant life.

AMEN.

⁷ In typing this sentence the first time, I typed, "This truth about the Church and its history *indicts* us..." I wonder if I should have followed this train of thought.

⁸ "The Nicene Creed", *The Book of Alternative Services*, Toronto, 1985, p. 188.