

SERMON – 9/1/22**'A Foundation in Christ'**

1 John 1:1-4

“The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.” (1 John 1:2)

As we get this New Year off to a full-blown start, we come this morning to the beginning of a new series of sermons on the First Letter of John in which I hope to explore with you different aspects of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in our challenging and changing times. What does it actually mean to be a Christian in 21st century Scotland? How does being a Christian make you different to the friend or neighbour or family member who does not acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, and what difference does following Jesus make to the way you live your life day by day, whether you are making widgets or working with people, whether you are retired or still at school, whether you live on your own or are engaged in the give and take of living with a significant other, what difference does being a Christian make to how you raise children or how you interact with your neighbour. Discipleship is not just about what you do with this hour on a Sunday morning or about the part you play in the ministry and mission of the church. It's about how each one of us reflects the Gospel story through the things we do (and don't do) as well as through the things we say (and don't say).

I came across an article this week entitled 'The Plural of Disciple is Church' and even the title has given me food for thought as we begin this sermon series, not least because although we tend to think about discipleship as being an individual thing we are very much in this together and we lose far more than we gain by trying to walk the Jesus way by ourselves. Although it is rather hard for us at the moment to have the kind of interaction with others in the church that we would like to have, before and after services and in small groups, I hope these coming weeks will provide an incentive for us each to find ways to begin sharing insights from our personal journey of faith with others in the church family and thereby to become less inhibited about going

on to share our faith with those friends and neighbours and family members who do not share our convictions or aspirations but who may well be more curious than you imagine about what makes us tick because we have Jesus in our lives.

But let's dive in to these opening verses of the First Letter of John that we have read this morning and get the journey underway. First John is unusual for a letter of its time in that it does not begin straightaway with the name of the author. (The only other letter in the New Testament that is similarly missing a sender's name is the Letter to the Hebrews). But the authorship of the letter is evident from the similarity of the writing style and themes and vocabulary to what we find in the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John and that is true right from the start. It was just a couple of weeks ago on Christmas Eve that we read the famous prologue to the Fourth Gospel. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1,14) What clear and wonderful echoes there are of that in the opening verses of this letter. "That which was from the beginning... this we proclaim concerning the Word of life... we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us." (1 John 1:1,2)

Two key truths are proclaimed about Jesus the Word of life: that the eternal Word was with God in the beginning but that that Word appeared in the flesh in the person of Jesus (or to use Eugene Peterson's evocative translation in *The Message*, 'God moved into the neighbourhood') and here John amplifies what that meant practically speaking when he writes of the Word as something "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched." (1 John 1:1) John's testimony and that of the entire Christian Church is what he and we proclaim – Jesus is God Almighty but Jesus is right here with us in the mud and mire of our humanity, crucially enabling those who in turn hear and see and look and touch to enter into the joy of fellowship with God and into eternal life. In other words, recognising and acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God and choosing to follow Him, to come with Him, to be

His disciple is the way to share in the eternal blessing of fellowship with God the Father.

There, then, is the *foundation* of our discipleship, the rock on which we stand and build, but there follows from that a parallel process for us to *live out* that discipleship – the word has to become flesh, the eternal has to appear, our faith has to be heard and seen and touched by others, and that, I think is the key message for today.

We have Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday and today and for ever, we have the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, we have a body of belief once entrusted to God's people to be handed on from generation to generation, but it all needs to 'appear' and to be 'made flesh' anew in every generation as singular disciples work together and bear witness as plural church. The mistake that Christians have made over and over again across the centuries is to fossilise the eternal and thereby idolise one expression of it rather than letting it find fresh expression day by day. A phrase of Abigail van Buren is a helpful pointer to that: "The church is a hospital for sinners not a museum for saints."

John writes of his own experience and that of his fellow-disciples when he describes here how they *heard* in the words of Jesus that which was from the beginning, the Word of life, when they *saw* it with their own eyes in Jesus and made efforts to *look* at it and examine it, and when they *touched* it with their hands – straining at the oars and pulling at the sails with Him on the boat, passing food amongst each other at the table, reaching out with Him to heal the sick and feed the hungry. His fellow-disciple, Peter, in his second letter tells a very similar story when he writes: "We did not follow cleverly-devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were *eye-witnesses* of his majesty... We ourselves *heard* this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain." (2 Peter 1:16,18)

The eternal Word *lived* among them, full of grace and truth and when *He* had returned to the Father *they* got on with testifying to what they had heard and seen and touched, proclaiming it not only in word but also in deed and lifestyle, in writing and in

action, so that others too could experience Jesus personally for themselves, being drawn into the fellowship of disciples that is the Church and into fellowship as John says here with God the Father Himself and with His Son Jesus Christ.

So, what do we have to learn this morning about being disciples, and about the difference being a Christian must make to our daily lives?

If you are not sure whether you are a disciple of Jesus yet, or if you have not yet decided whether accepting the call to follow Jesus is for you, then this is where you must begin – let me introduce you to Jesus, the image of the invisible God, the Word of God made flesh, the One who reveals Himself to us through all our physical senses as well as spiritually and invisibly. I testify to you and every other Christian will testify similarly (although their experience will be unique and from their own experience they will tell a slightly different story to the one I tell) not only by our words but by what you see of God at work in us and through our attitudes and our actions and the fruit of our living, and I call you to enter into fellowship with me and with every other person who has ever encountered the Word of life, the Son of God, so that you too will enter into fellowship with God the Father through Him and that your joy, my joy, our joy may be complete.

Over the coming weeks we will, I hope, be able to explore some of the practicalities of living as disciples of Jesus and what it means to put flesh around our words of faith. I hope to encourage you to talk with others about how we all can better follow Jesus day by day and to offer resources to read and to discuss over the next couple of months and beyond, but for today let me leave you with the thought that foundations are crucially important and that as the storms of life blow, our foundation has to be on Christ Himself, the solid Rock.

Jesus says, 'Come with me.' Let's go.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the everlasting Word of the Father, spoken from eternity, and yet you come to us today – we hear you, we see you, we reach out and touch you in the midst of the everyday and in this very moment. Thank you that You are my

Rock and my Redeemer, thank You that You who are the Word of life, yielded to death for my sake and in my place, and rose again to share with me Your everlasting victory. Help me to give up my earth-bound existence and to follow You into life in all its fulness in fellowship with Your faithful people and in perfect fellowship with God our Father, for we ask it in Your name, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.