

SERMON – 16/1/22**'A New Start'**

1 John 1:5 to 2:2

"If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

The avalanche of news in the past week about high-profile accusations of wrong-doing has probably generated much more heat than light, given that political point-scoring, suspicion about privilege and the economics of journalism have made it very difficult to get at the truth. But I have found myself asking a wide variety of questions, such as When is someone innocent until proven guilty? When is an apology not an apology? And is it ever right for public opinion or the media scrum to be the arbiter of the facts of any of these matters never mind the rights and wrongs of them?

You'll be glad to know I have no intention of entering in to the subject matter of any of these cases this morning but you may be less happy when I tell you that want to turn the spotlight onto ourselves and to ask you each to consider how you would like to be judged. In one of the house-groups this week I asked the question, 'If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?'

Last week we started to consider what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in Kinross in the 21st Century and how that makes us different from those of our family, friends and neighbours who do not have a place for Christ in their lives. Last week we were thinking about laying solid foundations and we said that it is for disciples of Jesus to build our lives on Him, putting flesh on our faith in our daily lives just as Christ put flesh on the eternal Word of God when He came among us, and testifying to the truth of God in the world so that others can also come to know Jesus through us.

This morning I want to say something more about the starting point for the life of discipleship because while we all may have good intentions about building our lives on the foundation of

Christ and about bearing witness to Jesus through the living of our lives, the reality is that all of us fall short, and that is why it is so important that our sharing of the Gospel message focusses on the question of forgiveness.

I don't know if you noticed but in the passage we read this morning there are six sentences beginning with the word 'If'. Now three of the 'what if' scenarios they describe sound the death knell to a life of discipleship while the other three are the spring-board to a life that will honour the Lord. So put very simply I have two points to make this morning – one is profoundly bad news and the other is revolutionary good news – but *both* of them need to be ringing in our ears as we go from here today.

Bad news first, I'm afraid, and this is where you may hear echoes of the kind of thing that has been in the news all week, except that this is not about somebody else (however high profile) it is about you and me.

Last week we saw how Jesus is the visible representation of the invisible God, living out perfectly in human flesh what He had always been with the Father in eternity. In this morning's reading John proclaims that God is light and that in Him there is no darkness at all, so it should be no surprise to us to read in John's Gospel of Jesus being that light in the world, nor to hear Him call His disciples in our turn to live as light in the world, to walk in the light.

John is uncompromising in his message here: "If we claim to have fellowship with God and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth." (v.6) That's bad news. And he drives it home with a second 'what if' - "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (v.8) And just in case we missed the point he is making, he repeats it a third time - "If we claim we have not sinned, we make *Him* out to be a liar and His Word is not in us." (v.10) In other words we cannot be described as a disciple of Jesus. If you or I choose darkness instead of light then we are choosing to turn our back on God and if we then try to suggest that that is not the case, not only are we blind to the reality of what we are doing we are actually exchanging the truth for a lie.

Now without entering in to the detail of any of the high profile cases that have been in the news this week (because I for one am not qualified to sit in judgment on any of them given that I have no first hand knowledge of any of them), whenever anyone is accused of anything, what is required is the shining of light into every dark corner where anything might be hidden so that the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth may be known, perfect judgment made and justice done. Bad news for the one who has done wrong (whether the perpetrator or the false accuser) and good news for the one who has been wronged (whether the victim or the one falsely accused).

God is light, my friends, and in Him there is no darkness at all. Before God there is absolutely nowhere to hide, so it is the height of arrogance to think that we can. But the Gospel of Christ is good news especially where the darkness seems to enfold us completely.

And that is why I need to move quickly to proclaim the second point that John makes here and which he again drives home in another set of three 'what if' scenarios. "If we walk in the light as [God] is in the light, John writes, the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin." (v.7) Isn't that good news?! In Christ there is hope even for the guilty. Hear it again. "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (v.9) Far from trying to slink away into the shadows in shame for having let Christ down, we are called to step into the spotlight and acknowledge our shortcomings because in Christ there is not condemnation but the way to forgiveness. Hear it again. "If anybody does sin, says John, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ the Righteous One." (ch.2 v.1) The courtroom image is of the judge's own son coming alongside the accused not only to speak up for you but to offer to pay the penalty you are due and to take the punishment in your place.

My dear friends, we each need to come out of hiding this morning and acknowledge our faults before God; don't let's try and pretend that we are anything other than we truly are (because God knows that already) but let us humbly accept the offer that Jesus makes to all who wish to come with Him, to be the sacrifice

for our sins, and let us proclaim that good news to this needy and broken world for which Christ also died.

Too many of us have preferred the darkness to the light either on the one hand by refusing to acknowledge that what we have done or what we have been has no place in the light of God, or on the other hand by refusing to accept the unmerited offer of forgiveness that Christ holds out to us no matter what disastrous actions may litter our past.

Listen now for the Gospel: "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Quite simply here is the door to a new start for any one of us. Open that door today and begin the journey of discipleship for real.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Light of the World, you shine into the darkest corners of our lives and we are truly ashamed of what lies there, ashamed too at our tawdry efforts to hide the reality of our sin. Thank you for your willingness to stand in our place and to bear our sin upon the Cross. We readily confess before you today that we have sinned in our thinking, speaking and doing and in what we have failed to do, and we ask you who are faithful and just to remove our transgression from us and set us free to walk in the light, free from condemnation, ready to forgive others as we have so generously been forgiven. Help us to share this glad news with all the world, that others too may come to know the joy and peace of sins pardoned, for we ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.