

The Real Easter Witness

7th Sunday of Easter, Year B – 1 John 5:9-13

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, May 17, 2015

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The small-town prosecuting attorney called to the stand his first witness, an elderly, grandmotherly woman. He approached her and asked, “Miss Sadie Beth Johnson, do you know me?” She responded, “Why, yes, I *do* know you, Robert Williams. I've known you since you were a boy. And frankly, Robert, you've been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat on your wife, and you manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. You think you're a big shot when you haven't the brains to realize you'll never amount to anything more than a two-bit paper pusher. Yes, sir, I know you.”

The lawyer was stunned as the court burst into laughter. Not knowing what *else* to do, he pointed across the room and asked, “Miss Johnson, do you know the counsel for the *defense*?” She again replied, “Why yes, sir, I do. I've known Tommy Bradley since he was a youngster, too. He's lazy, bigoted, and he has a drinking problem. He can't build a normal relationship with *anyone*, and his law practice is one of the worst in the entire state. Not to mention he cheated on his wife three times – with *three* different women. One of them was *your* wife, Bobby. Yes, I know him”.

The court again erupted in laughter, but the defense attorney nearly passed out. The judge gavelled the room to order and asked both counselors to approach the bench. Covering the microphone, and in a *very* quiet voice, the judge said, “If either of you idiots asks this witness if she knows *me*, I'll send you both to the chair.”

Back on Easter Sunday morning, I kept things going, you might remember, by periodically asking, “Can I get a witness?” And here as the Easter season draws to a close, as we come to the end of our look at the 1st Letter of John, as John comes to the end of his short treatise on the love of God, we find that we can *indeed* get a witness. Or rather, we see that God himself has *given* us a witness. “If we receive human testimony,” John says as he concludes his argument, “the testimony of God is greater.”

You see, from the beginning, the Creator has had just one testimony for the race of creatures he formed from the dust and called to life with his own breath. From the beginning of beginning, that testimony has been of his absolute love for us. Right at the beginning, having formed us from the earth itself, our Creator planted an entire world of goodness – for us, to protect us, to sustain us, to *delight* us. We know, of course, that our first ancestors didn't *listen* to that testimony. Instead of feasting on our dependence on God's love and each other's, we gnawed at the meager soured fruit of twisted *self-love*, and traded the whole garden of God's love for the toil of our own pride.

It wasn't long before our turning aside of God's love led us to turn our backs on each other as well, and the pride, and the division, and the bitterness nearly cost the annihilation of the whole of creation. But though we had turned our backs on him, God would not turn aside from his love for *us*. He chose a scrap of humanity, a remnant to bring through the destruction, and chose a People, descendants *all* of one man who looked to the stars to trust his Redeemer, a People to be a witness of his continued love and his longing for us to return that love, a People to be the light of and to the whole world.

Always still seeking to define our own limits, always still setting our own understanding of good and evil against the absolute law of love, God gave us the Law and we immediately set about the process of parsing out exactly what we *had* to do, rather than what we *could* do to love our Lord, what we owed our neighbors, rather than how we might share our love for them. God sent messenger after messenger to

lead us back again to trust and to rely and to love. But time after time we drove those prophets away so we don't have to hear what God has to say. Time after time after time, we listened to only what we *wanted* to hear. Time after time after time after time, we twisted again inward, turning our back on the love of God, and on each other.

Until, in the fullness of time, God *became* the witness of his love. From the depth and the richness of divine love, God became *part* of his creation, a particular, personal part of the long parade of the human race. All of us having been steeped in the story of Christmas from our births, from before our parents and grandparents' births, we take the Incarnation as a given. But the Incarnation, that God became human, is a concept that befuddles some, and absolutely offends many more. And yet, the fact that God did *exactly* that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth is foundational to how we understand God.

You see, living with all the dangers, and all the uncertainties, and even all the *temptations* of being a human, Jesus Christ unerringly following the calling of his Father, a witness to the One in whose love he rested. Fulfilling every law and completing every prophecy, suffering every pain and deprivation and cruelty of being human, he was driven to humanity's mocking *apex* of death, as a witness to his Father's love for the whole of the human race. And on the third day of his final taste of your condition and mine, he *annihilated* death itself by rising uncorrupted from the grave, and so doing witnesses for whatever is left of time that we need not fear even our own mortality, because he has bought for us the eternal life that was meant to be our birthright from the beginning of beginnings. In Christ's Resurrection, he witnesses to the absolute, unquenchable power of love, even over death and the grave.

The other day at our mid-week celebration of the Feast of the Ascension, I mentioned that in addition to assuring that the risen Christ is "above all and in all," I am convinced that he has ascended to the right hand of the Father for a more *specific* reason as well. When the Accuser, the one whose name in Hebrew is *ha Satan*, stands before the Throne of God and accuses you, or you, or me, when the great Teller of Lies says, "How can you love that one, or that one, or this one?" when the Tempting serpent whispers that there is nothing there to love, then Jesus, the risen and ascended Christ will hold out his nail-scarred hands and declare, "Yes, *sir*, I know them." "I *know* him." "I *know* her." "I have known them since they were born." "I have known them since the *stars* were born." "And I have loved them just that long."

"If we receive human testimony," John says, "the testimony of God is greater." Now *that's* a witness!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!