

Easter Means...We Have Fellowship with God!

A sermon based on 1 John 1:1-4

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

“Listen, we need to talk.” Does anything good ever follow those words? In my experiences, not usually. I’m sure it’s the same for you, too. Those words often indicate a change (usually not for the better) in a relationship...with friends, at work, with a significant other...

So, listen, today we need to talk...and it’s not about you and me. I know Easter was last week, but it’s Easter again...not only because we’re still in the season of Easter, but because every Sunday is a little Easter. Every Sunday we continue to rejoice in Christ’s resurrection and in our Easter victory.

Because of Easter, our relationship with God looks different. Because of Easter, our relationship with God is different. And that affects the relationships we have with each other as well. Listen, because today, Easter means...we have fellowship with God.

Now, relationships is one of the key reasons why John wrote this letter, 1 John. Maybe you recall how this is known as the book of “love” in the Bible because of how often John uses that word throughout five short chapters...and maybe that gives you some indications about what our relationship with God looks like.

And that’s the relationship John primarily focuses on in this entire letter, as he sought to give believers assurance of the salvation/restored relationship they had in Jesus...because their relationship with God and their salvation from him was being threatened by a false religion, called Gnosticism. And two of the main teachings of Gnosticism were: 1) People could achieve salvation (on their own) not through faith in Jesus but by attaining this special kind of knowledge; and 2) They denied that Jesus was true man. And...as with any false teaching, Gnosticism was threatening to pull people away from Jesus and ruin that relationship, so John wrote.

And we have the beginning of this letter, where John builds up his credibility as an eyewitness of Jesus, true God and true Man, and where he begins to touch on the relationship, or the fellowship, we have with Jesus (which we’ll talk about now)...and with each other (which we’ll get to later)

Now, what’s fellowship? Because that’s the goal of John’s letter and, really, of all of Scripture, so what is fellowship? It’s more than just a close association with someone. It’s something closer than the relationship between spouses. It’s that special spiritual relationship established between the true God and those who have saving faith in Jesus Christ. Through faith we are united with the divine, with Jesus, and in this fellowship we receive all of God’s blessings.

Do you have fellowship with Jesus? Of course, that is a resounding “Yes!” So, what does your relationship with Jesus look like? We can talk about what it was...every one of us, born dying on a dying planet...sinful at birth, outside of God’s family, enemies of God, spiritually dead, facing a life of pain, certain death, and condemnation in hell.

But that’s all changed because of the love of one man (yes, true man), our God, Jesus, who lived a perfect life, and died our death on the cross, and rose victoriously from the grave to save us and

reconcile us to God and restore our relationship with God. And, by him giving us faith in him, that forgiveness and righteousness is ours.

So, now, what does our relationship with Jesus look like? It's great, right? Well, not so fast. Do you know what Jesus says makes for a great...the ideal relationship with him? He actually tells us later in 1 John 5 – ***"This is love for God: to obey his commands."*** There you have it, straight from the mouth of Jesus. Not complicated at all. A right relationship with Jesus, a loving relationship with Jesus...on our part, is doing what he asks us to in his Word.

Do you? I probably couldn't count the number of people I've talked to – delinquents, people caught in sin, apathetic believers...others, whose main arguments have boiled down to this: "I'm fine. I have a relationship with Jesus. We're good."

Tell me...is a pattern of infrequent and lax church attendance and a neglect of the Means of Grace (that's the gospel in Word and Sacrament) when Jesus says, ***"Let us not give up meeting together...but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching,"*** is that "being good" with Jesus? Or, when you're here, but you're not...not actively participating, zoning out, is that the ***"I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go the house of the Lord'"*** the psalmist writes about, or it is more of a ***"these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me"***? How well do your other relationships work when you hear, but don't really listen or communicate back to the other person?

Does not having time for Jesus or his Word outside of worship (whatever your excuses might be about being too busy or forgetful or not thinking you need it), when Jesus says, ***"Just as you received Christ...continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught,"*** and ***"let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,"***...when you're not finding or embracing more ways to have your faith in Jesus growing and strengthened through his Word, is your relationship "fine"?

When Jesus says, ***"Each (one of you) should use whatever gift they have received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms...so that in all thing God may be praised,"*** does laziness or indifference or unwillingness to watch your life, your tongue, your actions, neglecting to act on opportunities Jesus gives you to serve him and others with what he's given you (time, talents, treasures)...what does that say about your relationship with Jesus?

I know I can't be the only one to say, "I'm a sinner, and that means I have a less than ideal relationship with Jesus." If I am, I praise God for you and your perfect faithfulness.

Is the kind of relationship Jesus wants you to have with him one where you're too busy for him or you don't care about or you're not doing what he wants? I can tell you not too many personal relationships work too well that way. Our relationship with God is no different.

If any of that's you (to any degree), I'm sorry to tell you, you're not fine, you're not good with Jesus, you're not having the kind of relationship Jesus wants you to have with him. And to think otherwise would be lying to yourself and playing right into Satan's hand.

Have you ever heard the saying, "Marriage is 50/50"...that it's give and take? That's a lie. In order for a marriage, and any relationship, for that matter, to work well, it takes each person giving 100%, 100% of the time. Our relationship with Jesus is no different. We haven't...we don't give 100%. And we

threaten the very fellowship we have with Jesus, endangering our losing out on the blessings he has for us, both here and in eternity.

But we don't. Because Jesus went about and beyond the call of duty...gave way more than 100% to restore our relationship with him.

Think about the disciples on Easter Sunday – they had deserted Jesus to be arrested, beaten, killed. They betrayed him, denied him, had so weak of a faith in Jesus that they heard the tomb was empty and instead of rejoicing Jesus had risen just as he said he would, they were terrified instead that the Jews were coming after them.

Despite all their failures, when Jesus appeared to the women as they hurried away from the tomb, Jesus chose to call the disciples something he had never called them before. Previously Jesus had called them his "children". He had even called them his "friends". However, this is the first time Jesus calls them "brothers".

Easter meant something new for Jesus' disciples. Easter meant that they were renewed with Jesus' forgiveness and they had a new relationship with him. Easter meant that Jesus would not judge the disciples by what they had done but by the sacrifice he made for them.

Brothers and sisters, that's the fellowship...that's the relationship we have with Jesus. Do you feel that you have failed God? Do you fear you've let him down? Do you worry your sins separate you from God? Even though that's all true, Easter means we don't have to fear God's anger...because Jesus gave 100% and more for you. Jesus gave up perfection for you. Jesus took the beatings and the cross for you. Jesus went to the grave for you. Jesus came out of the grave for you.

Because Jesus defeated sin and death and rose from the grave, we are not judged by what we've done but by what Jesus has done for us. Trusting in him as our Savior, Jesus calls us his brothers and sisters— not because we deserve it but because he dearly loves us. Jesus renews us with his forgiveness and gives us a new relationship with him...where he doesn't see our failures and our imperfections. He only sees his love in us.

Because the Word of life...the eternal life (John's references to Jesus here) appeared...took life (became man)...and lived and died and rose for us, we have the guarantee of a restored relationship with God. We have fellowship with God.

And now, it's our turn to give 100% back to God as a response of thanks and love...and to make our joy complete.

So, how will we do that? It starts with preventative maintenance. It's a term I heard applied at a marriage renewal Becky and I went to last year. The presenter used that term as he told us, "You came here because you want to do these things (things that make a marriage amazing) better or you want to start doing these things." Things that maintain and strengthen the marriage and prevent it from falling apart. We get to do that in our relationship with Jesus.

You know, a lot of people today don't have time for Jesus. You do. When you're in God's Word, your faith in Jesus grows....and so does your relationship. When you curb your tongue, your actions, your life to stay in line with how Jesus wants you to live...when you actively seek to use your gifts and abilities to serve Jesus and others, your faith in Jesus shows...and so does your relationship.

But here...this is one of the biggest areas of preventative maintenance. Here, we get to experience Jesus and his love like no other place. I'm not trying to be all New Age, touchy-feely with you. In our verses, John uses sensory words like ***"that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched."*** Worship is a multi-sensory experience...you hear the words of forgiveness and of God's grace spoken to you, the body and blood of Jesus touch your lips, you see the cross and all it stands for, you see and hear other believers – sinners, saints, just like you – confessing belief in the same loving God. And in all of that, your relationship with Jesus grows.

And finally, so does your relationship with each other...as brothers and sisters in Christ. Right, John writes, ***"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us."***

It makes our joy complete when we can find people, a spiritual family, who believes the same thing we do and join together to grow in our faith in Jesus and live out our faith...as we work together for the sake of Jesus and for the good of the gospel.

Brothers and sisters, Easter means we have fellowship with God and with each other. Don't treat those relationships lightly or take them for granted. Instead, we will find ways to grow in those relationships here, in God's Word, in our lives. And we'll act, giving God 100% because we're so thankful for our restored relationship with Jesus. And we'll keep doing that until our joy is really complete...in eternal glory. That's all because we have fellowship with God. Amen.