

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Throughout the Easter season, we have been reading through the first letter of John. In this letter, we have several repeated themes. One of these themes is lies vs truth. John describes the liars in five different ways. We heard it again today, and as we have come to the end of the Easter season, and therefore we will not be looking at 1 John again for 3 years until it returns to the lectionary, today we are going to look at lies and truth in this letter and consider the lies and truth we encounter today.

Before we do, some general points on the New Testament are important to consider. The New Testament letters are written for certain contexts and specific situations. When we read them we want to consider what those situations are. Sometimes they are simply proclaiming or repeating the Gospel, (for example in Romans), but often they are dealing with specific errors, difficulties or problems in that place. Galatians' error of teaching, Corinthian's various sinful behaviours, 1 Peter a church under persecution. When we read John's first letter we should consider what situation he might be writing about, what are the people of the congregation saying or doing that has caused him to make these points?

This leads to my second general point about all the New Testament letters, they are written to and for believers. Their purpose is not primarily to convert but to sustain the faith. This doesn't mean that they only deal with matters of Christian living, or only treat the law as it applies to believers, as most of the letters contain many gospel proclamations, but their purpose is not to convert nor evangelize. Their purpose is to guide congregations of believers. That is why I am so confident that when John uses the word 'brothers' and the term 'one another' he is referring to other believers, he's not talking about loving people who are not in the church, he's talking about loving people who are in the church. You know well enough that this is a difficult task.

Finally, John is primarily interested in helping his congregation remain in the faith. He knows full well what Jesus said at the last supper as we heard in our gospel readings these past two weeks. 'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me'. John 15:4 (ESV) John wants his listeners to remain in Christ so that they bear fruit, all these distinctions between lies and truth are to send them back to the truth, the vine of Christ.

Let us then approach the lies and truth that John presents.

### Lie 1

<sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:10 (ESV)

We are going to approach each of these statements with three questions, who is the liar, what is the lie, what is the truth?

The liar in this statement is Jesus. As in we, people, make Jesus into a liar when we deny our sin. For Jesus tells us that we are sinners. In Luke's account of the ascension Jesus tells the disciples that they will preach 'that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations', beginning from Jerusalem. Luke 24:47 (ESV) Repentance requires all to be sinners, forgiveness is only necessary for sinners. Those who have no sin need no forgiveness, the well do not need a doctor. The liar here becomes Jesus as humanity and individual humans deny sin.

The lie has three parts, part one is that we deny that all of humanity post the fall of Adam is sinful. This can lead us to think we can save ourselves, or that we just don't need saving at all.

Secondly, we deny that I am a sinner. This is our usual state, this is the state of the Pharisees who refused to see that they were sinners. Despite their earthly good reputation, Jesus proclaims that they too need saving.

Thirdly we redefine specific sins so that we can continue in them and not feel guilty. We do this when we make statements like 'everyone else does it,' thinking that this makes our sin acceptable. Or 'our society has changed' is used as an excuse to justify our or others' sinful behaviour.

Instead of attempting to justify sin, by denying sin, and specifically my sin, we are called to acknowledge our sin and all sin, turn from it and receive God's great gifts. There should be no fear for a Christian to confess sin, as confession is the pathway to freedom. Denial of sin leaves us in bondage to sin. Repentance leads to Christ's freedom, it is the core of his message, as John reiterates. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (ESV)

John continues to identify lies that are prevalent in the Christian community in the next chapter.

## Lie 2

<sup>4</sup>Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup>whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. 1 John 2:4-6 (ESV)

The liar here says they love God but does not keep his commands. We need to define two terms in this section that will help us through all these texts. Love here does not refer to a feeling or disposition, it refers to action and specifically God's action in saving us through Jesus. That is how God loves, through Jesus' mission on earth, birth, life, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension.

The second definition is commands or commandments and we'll let John define that. <sup>23</sup>And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just

as he has commanded us. 1 John 3:23 (ESV) Command does not primarily mean do, it means believe in Jesus as the Christ. The secondary meaning is an action and that is to love one another.

Once we have these in order, we can see the truth and lies. John points out that you can't say, 'I love God' and not trust him. Instead, when you trust him to forgive your sins you offer your life to serve others just as Jesus has already served you. Trusting Jesus and loving others go hand in hand, love for others springs out of faith, for faith brings forgiveness, and forgiveness gives freedom from works of righteousness into service of God.

### Lie 3

<sup>22</sup>Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup>No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. 1 John 2:22–23 (ESV)

The lie in this third lie denies that Jesus is the Christ. We need a definition here also. Christ is not Jesus' name, Christ is one of Jesus' titles. It is drawn from the Old Testament promise of the Messiah (Hebrew) and relates to Jesus' divinity. The Messiah is the son of God, he is God who came to save. Therefore, to understand this lie we need to see that some people do not believe that Jesus is God. That is the simple truth. Many who claim to be believers have wanted and still want to describe who Jesus is differently from the church. They attack both his humanity (he was a ghost, not truly human, cast off his humanity), or attack his divinity (he's only a man, he's not God, he is a spirit, or worse still possessed by an evil spirit). This lie is why we have our creeds. All three of the creeds are primarily written to combat various heresies relating to Jesus. That is why they so specifically describe who he is and what he has done.

What is at stake in this lie is that when you deny Jesus divinity you lose the Father. When you confess that Jesus is the Christ you receive that Father also. But this should not be surprising for Jesus tells us <sup>30</sup>I and the Father are one." John 10:30 (ESV) and in his high priestly prayer that we heard today, he prayed and revealed that 'he came from God'.

These lies persist, even though we have our creeds to keep us grounded in Jesus' truth. Many groups that claim to be Christian slip into these lies for instance the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Muslims are all groups that have a distorted view of Jesus' humanity and divinity. Therefore they all have another God and not the one true God because when they deny Jesus they lose the Father.

### Lie 4

<sup>20</sup>If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 1 John 4:20 (ESV)

This is largely a repetition of lie 2. You can't claim to love God and hate your brother. We should see hate here in the same light as love, hate is not primarily a feeling or disposition it is an action or maybe better still a lack of action. If love is to do something good for your brother in Christ, hate is to see that thing needs to be done and ignore it.

This return to theme shows us the state of the church to which John wrote. They obviously had some divisions of people and an unwillingness to care for one another. Perhaps it was slaves who were members of the congregation who were treated with contempt by their slave owners, as was the case in Corinth or as is detailed in Paul's letter to Philemon in Colosse. But it could also have been that there was an unwillingness to serve those who were freemen but not wealthy, or those who were sick, ill, displaced, or of another ethnic origin, perhaps it was even people from within families who were not being looked after. John doesn't tell us, but we can assume by the fact that he spends much time on the theme that it was a problem in the church community.

We often like to romanticise about the past, that because they couldn't travel great distances, or communicate so easily and quickly over long distances, they had a stronger community. Perhaps in some ways they did, they had to engage people around them, for they had no other option, they couldn't spend all day listening to a voice from a box on the other side of the world or typing and maintaining relationships with unknown faces. But they still had the same problems we do, fallen sinners are not good at looking past their own noses to see the needs of others. We see this in families, congregations and the church. We are all mostly interested in how I am going in life and fail to interest ourselves in serving others. This lack of community is a seventh commandment violation and we should be running to Jesus to receive his forgiveness and as we repent, seek many ways to rebuild our communities.

Perhaps I've been too obtuse here and need to be more direct. We might be inclined to think that the biggest risk to our congregations and parish is either a lack of finance or a division caused by a long protracted theological debate. But these are not the biggest risks, the biggest risk to our congregations is the breakdown in community. We can't stand by while our brothers and sisters in the faith slowly drift away and do nothing. We can't keep briefly talking to the same people for 5 or 10 minutes on a Sunday, or every other Sunday or once a few months and think that this is going to keep them engaged in the Christian community. We can't stand by while portions of our congregations don't feel as if they fit in because they have never been welcomed, we can't ignore the fact that many have left because they were offended by the way we argued and treated each other poorly, we can't leave it to just one person, or the pastor, or ignore a whole portion of our congregation who don't seem to want to make an effort. This can't just be shallow and piecemeal, but it could be small, to begin with, we need to pick up the phone, knock on doors, share meals, have difficult and purposeful faith conversations, and make contact with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must do something to show our love for God by loving our neighbour, we need to

rebuild our church community. When we fail to do it, because we think it is someone else's problem, or we're too busy or just don't care, we are in effect hating our brother. For when we refuse to share the love of God with someone who has gone through the very same waters of baptism as we have. This is what Jesus told us would be the entry point for many into the faith and a testimony to the love of Christ, 'By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'" John 13:35 (ESV)

#### Lie 5

Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. 1 John 5:10 (ESV)

Here we again find that the liar is not the human but the liar is God. That is humans accuse God of lies when they do not believe in the Father or the Son. The lie then becomes unbelief but the liar is not the human instead, humanity accuses God of lies.

Again, a definition might be in order, 'believe' is not, as we have redefined it, blind faith. Instead, belief is to trust the witness and see that there are many proofs to the risen Lord and know that because Jesus is risen from the dead, all he said about himself is truth. This is not just limited to his work of salvation for us, although that is primary, it means that we also trust the apostles' words that are written for us, and to a degree we trust the words of disciples who came later, and the traditions handed down to us by the church that are shown to come from the apostles.

The primary truth here is that Jesus has come to save us, and he has. He was born, did live, did suffer, was dead, then alive and now has ascended into heaven and he will come to judge the living and the dead. We do not fear this judgement for we know he has already taken our judgement on himself. We are free to love him in both word and deed, holding fast to his teaching and loving our neighbour.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus says, I am the way the truth and the life, abide in him as our vine, and bask in the mercy of his prayer so that we remain in him, not in this world and that by remaining in him we may be made Holy as he is Holy.

Lord Sanctify us in the truth; your word is truth. John 17:17 (ESV)