

Holy Humor Sunday, April 8, 2018

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1 John 1:1 – 2:2

You may be wondering why I have this shepherd's staff up here: prop joke. I had to look all over for this thing. I was going to say that I got it out of the prop closet that's in our Sunday school room, but this would be a lie. They didn't have one that would work. I had to ask around. I asked people from a bunch of other churches around here. Finally First Baptist came through. All for a really, really bad prop joke.

I *wanted* to say that we could use it like a hook in one of those vaudeville acts. You know, if the jokes weren't good enough, the pastor could grab it and yank me off stage. But then I started thinking about how bad that first joke was... And I was like... Do I *really* want people daydreaming about pulling me off stage this morning? Every bad joke (of which there will be many - that's a promise) to have people casually glance over there - and me - standing here forced to carry on...?

AND, I thought that... you know... since Pastor literally meant shepherd, I could make a joke about him being the good shepherd and saving the day. But that very thought set me on edge because of this other joke I told like... 15 years ago.

I was in my dorm room at Bible College - true story - and back then, as now, I didn't really *get* comedy. And my roommate walks in. "How's it going, my good man?" he says.

And I take on this air of dignity, and I say, "Why do you call me good? Don't you know that there is only one that is good?" I didn't even know what I was saying. I was just joking around.

But he got very, very serious. "Why did you say that?" he asked. "Do you even realize what you just said?" Things got tense real fast. You know, I stammered around a little bit, as I am wont to do. Just. *awkward laugh* heh. heh. Joking around.

Jesus said that to prove his divinity. You're not Jesus. It's not funny to even joke about.

That was one of the first times I realized - I mean, REALLY realized - that there's a line. Comedy makes its name by crossing that line. But sometimes. Sometimes that line shouldn't be crossed.

I've thought about that a lot in making this message, because (if I'm living my life openly, here) I love crossing that line. "Anything for a laugh" has pretty much been my life's motto, and even though I only get the laugh about 20-25% of the time, another of my life's mottos is, "You miss 100% of the jokes you don't make," so I keep swinging.

The hook's right there, folks.

Anyway, I've thought about that line a lot while debating about this message. Two things in particular stood out in my memory. A Far Side comic of Abraham Lincoln, and Mayor Giuliani on SNL. *project's Far Side comic*

In The Far Side comic, Lincoln has crossed the line - in a bad way. The joke works because it's so absurd. The setup is Lincoln at Gettysburg. The punch is that his opener to the Address is a joke. (And it looks like a bad joke.) Thousands dead and wounded, and he opens with, "That's not a duck." Line crossed.

But then, the after Sept. 11th, Mayor Giuliani was on SNL with people from the NYPD and NYFD. It's impossible for me to recreate the tension of those days and months. And seeing those people on the stage was powerful. And remember, it wasn't just the Twin Towers. Anthrax had been sent to 30 Rock Sept. 25th, and this show was Sept. 28th. But there's Giuliani and Lorne Michaels up on stage with all the firefighters and police officers, and Michaels asks, can we be funny? And Giuliani's rejoinder is, "Why start now?" It was a powerful moment.

If nothing else, I want you to be aware that I know there's a line. And I *especially after the "my good man" discussion, I recognize the weight - especially the weight that is placed on the people who are behind (or around the pulpit.) These aren't just words. They're the words of God.

Let's pray before we get into the Bible.

Prayer

Here's a joke: I'm preaching on a text that we could easily get a dozen sermons out of.

For instance, look at that opening line, "We proclaim to you the one who existed in the beginning. The one we have seen and heard." We could spend a lot of time looking at the parallels between 1st John and John. (In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God." Again, this reiterates that this isn't just someone's opinions. John's not here saying, "hey, I

think these things. Here are some words I've strung together." He's saying, "This is the Word of God. And Jesus Christ is God."

There's a sermon or two in there.

And I went back and looked at Neil's sermon from last week. Neil preached from John 20, and reminded us that John was the first person to believe the resurrection of Christ without actually seeing it. And that's important. Neil stopped at verse 18, but if you kept reading chapter 20 through verse 29 you get to this familiar passage: blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe. The whole chapter from last week deals with the senses. Mary saw the empty tomb. Saw Jesus risen. Heard Him call her name. Later they felt his wounds. John believed before seeing. But he goes on to say, that he did see, hear, feel. And he reiterates that here. These passages parallel one another. "We saw him with our own eyes, and touched him with our own hands... We proclaim that we have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us..."

Certainly there's another sermon or two in there.

Let's look at the part I *DO* want to look at: verses 5-10. The passage seems like a bad joke, right? (Reread verses, with interpretation darkness = sin.)

Let me sum up: There is no sin in God. We can't say we know God and continue living in sin. And you keep sinning. So...

It's like John's saying, "You can live in the light - sin free: Punch line: no you can't." It's the worst type of joke. It's Lucy pulling the football out from under Charlie Brown.

Stick with me here, or you're going to miss a couple key points. First of all, let me submit two things: 1: that this passage is not a joke. And 2: that darkness in this passage is not sin.

The truth of this passage is self-evident. We sin. A lot. Even when we don't want to, or think we've overcome our sin. We sin.

And we know that Jesus is holy and just to forgive us our sin.

But the darkness above isn't sin. It's darkness. God calls on us to confess our sins before him. Just above that passage, John is talking about fellowship, see? "And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy."

I called that same college roommate a number of times to discuss this sermon with him. He said, "I ask this question to my youth group. Think about the most fun thing you can imagine. Your favorite video game. Going out to your favorite restaurant. Going to your favorite amusement park. Whatever. If you have something that is incredibly amazing - where *the thing itself* can't get any better, what *would* make it better? Having someone to share it with." C.S. Lewis has that famous quote on friendship, "Friendship... is born at the moment when one man says to another, "What! You too? I thought that no one but myself..."

God wants us to have fellowship with Him. And to have genuine fellowship we have to have openness. In one of the sermons I listened to in preparing to give this message, Colin Smith (of Cornell University, and also *ahem* Baptist Bible College*) said, "If I want a genuine relationship with someone, I can't hide my faults..." and "Relationships demand openness. If you can hide something from someone it means there's something wrong with the relationship."

God demands that we're open before Him. We keep things from each other here. It's human nature, and sometimes it makes things easier. I mean sometimes. Like... If I was open and honest and told every single person every single thing they did that annoys me, I would have zero friends. But the people we're closest to are the people we're most open with. I won't tell my intimate problems with my casual friends. There are number of reasons for this: socially it'd be weird. Like they *really* want to know my medical history. You know, down at Better World Books lifting up my shirt, "does this look inflamed to you?" Or you're worried they'll share something you don't want them to share, because can't trust your casual friends. You don't have true fellowship with them.

There are levels of fellowship, and there are levels of openness (living in the Light) that correspond with that fellowship. You've got your relationship with the cashier at Better World Books. You're probably closer with the people in your book club that you read those books with. Maybe, there's one or two in there that you're REALLY close with. You go home to your spouse after book club, and presumably you are more open and intimate with them. But your closest, most open relationship should be the one that you have with God.

We *have* to be open before God. In the verses I read, I ask you to read them again as if light means confession - and not sinlessness. And that darkness means the opposite of confession. Trying to hide our sins before God. (Read it again.)

Isn't it weird, too, to think that we can hide something from God? Like, I mean... we know that it sometimes hurts our relationships to hide things from people, but we may be able to get away with it for a while. Homer Simpson once said, "And now for that happy time period between telling the lie and when it gets found out." I think he told Marge that he'd read the book she wrote, but he really hadn't. He also says in that episode, "I swore never to read again after I read "To Kill a Mockingbird, and it gave me no useful advice on killing mockingbirds."

So maybe we can get away with for a little while, but all that time, it's hurting our relationship. We know guilt. And there is freedom in confession. I'm guessing we have all experienced having to ask for forgiveness for something. And the pain that comes with it. But also the freedom that comes with it.

Again, it's weird to think we can hide from God. Living in darkness before God makes literally zero sense. Like Adam and Eve hiding after eating the fruit. Then lying about wearing clothes. What? You're going to fool God? Last year JE brought up Sarah laughing. When confronted, she said she didn't laugh. Take a guess as to whether or not God knew.

So living in darkness (the opposite of confession) makes no sense. God already knows. Like the kid with cookie all around his mouth saying he didn't eat the cookie. It's funny, because that's how we are.

We sin. But we confess that sin and live in the light. God is faithful and just to forgive. And that's no joke.