

"THE JOY OF FELLOWSHIP"

1 JOHN 1:1-2:2

SECOND S. OF EASTER

MESSIAH, BOERNE

APRIL 7, 2024

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: 1 JOHN 1:1-2:2

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

THIS PAST WEEK MANY PEOPLE MENTIONED TO ME HOW MUCH THEY ENJOYED OUR EASTER CELEBRATION. CELEBRATING OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION TOGETHER AS GOD'S FAMILY HERE AT MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH CERTAINLY BROUGHT A GREAT DEAL OF JOY TO OUR CONGREGATION AND TO ME AS WELL. THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S SAVING WORK IN JESUS CHRIST—HIS SINLESS LIFE, HIS INNOCENT SUFFERING AND DEATH IN OUR PLACE, AND HIS GLORIOUS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD—PUTS JOY INTO THE HEART OF EVERY REPENTANT BELIEVER. WOULDN'T IT BE GREAT IF WE COULD ALWAYS HAVE SUCH JOY IN OUR LIVES? WELL, IN OUR EPISTLE READING TODAY ST. JOHN TELLS US HOW WE CAN: THROUGH FAITH IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND HIS ATONING SACRIFICE FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS, AS HE SAYS, "IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, [GOD] IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS" (1:9).

YOU SEE, SIN IS WHAT KEEPS US FROM BEING ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY, FROM GETTING ALONG WITH ONE ANOTHER IN PEACE AND

HARMONY, FROM HAVING *THE JOY OF FELLOWSHIP* IN OUR LIVES. DR. KARL MENNINGER, THE FAMOUS PSYCHIATRIST AND AUTHOR, WROTE A BEST-SELLING BOOK IN WHICH HE POSED THE QUESTION, "WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?" HIS GOAL WAS TO CALL ATTENTION TO THE DEEP PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE THAT OFTEN RESULTS WHEN THE REALITY OF SIN IS NO LONGER TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN UNDERSTANDING HUMAN BEHAVIOR. SIN IS ALIVE AND WELL AND DESTROYING THE LIVES AND RELATIONSHIPS OF CHRISTIANS AND NON-CHRISTIANS ALL OVER THE WORLD. SIN KEEPS US FROM *THE JOY OF FELLOWSHIP*.

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SIN CAN BE UNDERSTOOD IN VARIOUS WAYS. FOR EXAMPLE, SIN IS LIKE A *WALL* (EPH 2:12-16). IT STANDS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PEOPLE GROUPS AND KEEPS THEM FROM BEING ONE, AS PORTRAYED MUSICALLY IN THE ALBUM, "THE WALL," BY PINK FLOYD. ASK ANY HUSBAND AND WIFE WHO ARE ANGRY WITH EACH OTHER AND CAN'T RESOLVE THEIR DISAGREEMENT. THE SILENCE THAT RESULTS IS LIKE A WALL. PART OF TEARING DOWN THAT WALL MIGHT INCLUDE A HEALTHY ARGUMENT, BUT EVEN THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE CAREFULLY AND CONSTRUCTIVELY, LEST THE WALL IS BUILT HIGHER AND THICKER BY "JUST ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL."

SIN IS LIKE A *CANCER*. RESEARCHERS SPEAK OF CANCER CELLS ENCODING THE WRONG INFORMATION IN THEIR DNA AND THEN REPRODUCING IT IN AN UNCONTROLLABLE WAY. SIN THAT IS NOT

REMOVED IS LIKE A CANCER AND CAN GRADUALLY TAKE OVER A PERSON'S LIFE, BECOMING THE CONTROLLING IMPULSE OF BEHAVIOR AND REPRODUCING ITSELF IN COUNTLESS MALIGNANT WAYS. ANY SIN THAT INVOLVES A DESTRUCTIVE HABIT IS AN EXAMPLE OF SUCH BEHAVIOR.

SIN IS LIKE A *POISON*. IT RUINS RELATIONSHIPS, WRECKS FRIENDSHIPS, SOURS A PERSON'S OUTLOOK, DESTROYS TRUST, CREATES BITTERNESS, AND WORKS DEATH. SIN LIES AT THE BOTTOM OF EVERY AWFUL THING A PERSON CAN THINK AND DO.

I SUPPOSE YOU RECOGNIZE, AT THE HEART OF "SIN" IS THE LETTER "I." IT IS "I" WANTING TO HAVE THINGS *MY WAY*, DOING WHAT I THINK IS *RIGHT*, WANTING TO PROTECT *MY EGO*, WHICH, BY THE WAY, IS THE GREEK WORD FOR "I." IT IS "I" WANTING TO BE *MY OWN GOD* INSTEAD OF LISTENING TO WHAT THE TRIUNE GOD TELLS ME *HE* WANTS FOR ME IN HIS WORD. IT IS "I" SAYING, "I CAN GET ALONG PRETTY WELL BY MYSELF, THANK YOU. I DON'T NEED ANYONE OR ANYTHING ELSE TELLING ME WHAT TO THINK OR HOW TO BEHAVE."

SO, YOU SEE, IT'S NOT HARD AT ALL TO FIGURE OUT WHY WE CAN'T GET ALONG WITH EACH OTHER, WHY WE CAN'T ALWAYS HAVE THE JOY OF FELLOWSHIP IN OUR LIVES. WE ALL KNOW WHAT THE PROBLEM IS, AND BY WHATEVER NAME WE CALL IT, IT STILL SMELLS THE SAME. THE PROBLEM IS *SIN* AND IT *STINKS*.

NOW, PEOPLE HAVE TRIED VARIOUS SOLUTIONS TO THE FELLOWSHIP-DESTROYING PROBLEM OF SIN. FOR EXAMPLE, SOME PEOPLE TRY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF SIN BY INSISTING ON *PERFECTION*. "I WILL LOVE YOU," HE OR SHE MAY THINK OR SAY, "IF YOU LIVE UP TO MY STANDARDS. IF YOU DON'T MAKE A MISTAKE OR MAKE ME ANGRY, THEN WE'LL GET ALONG JUST FINE." YOU SEE, IF SIN IS THE PROBLEM, THEN THE SOLUTION, THEY THINK, IS SIMPLE: JUST DON'T SIN . . . AND, BY THE WAY, IF YOU DO, GOD HELP YOU! STRICT RULES, EXCEEDINGLY HIGH STANDARDS, STERN DISCIPLINE, AND SWIFT, SEVERE PUNISHMENT ARE ALL TOOLS USED TO ENFORCE THIS APPROACH TO SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF SIN.

DOES IT WORK? WELL, OUTWARDLY IT MAY *SEEM* EFFECTIVE, BUT IT DOESN'T DO ANYTHING FOR A PERSON'S SOUL, WHERE THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM IS. INDEED, A TEENAGE BOY WAS RECENTLY CONVICTED OF MURDERING HIS FATHER, WHO HAD SEVERELY ABUSED HIS MOTHER, SISTER, AND HIM BY ENFORCING AN EXTREMELY STRICT STYLE OF OBEDIENCE. SURE, THE OUTWARD BEHAVIOR WAS CONTROLLED BY FEAR BUT THE INWARD ANGER FINALLY BOILED OVER, AS THE SCRIPTURES SAY, "THE LAW BRINGS WRATH" (ROM 4:15).

OTHER PEOPLE TRY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF SIN BY *MINIMIZING* IT. THEY SAY SUCH THINGS AS, "OH, SIN ISN'T THAT BAD. AFTER ALL, TO ERR IS HUMAN. BOYS WILL BE BOYS.

MY SINFUL BEHAVIOR DOESN'T HURT ANYONE ELSE. DON'T TAKE SOMEONE ELSE'S SINS TOO SERIOUSLY. AFTER ALL, LIFE-STYLES ARE PURELY A MATTER OF CHOICE." REALLY? AND MORE CORROSIVE STILL: "I CAN *CONTINUE* THIS SINFUL LIFE-STYLE AND *STILL* PROFESS TO BE A CHRISTIAN."

BUT JOHN WRITES, "IF WE SAY WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH [GOD] WHILE WE WALK IN DARKNESS, WE LIE AND DO NOT PRACTICE THE TRUTH" (1:6). YOU SEE, WE CAN'T HAVE IT BOTH WAYS. DELIBERATE SIN AND FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD ARE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE.

STILL OTHERS TRY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF SIN BY *DENYING* IT. THEY SAY SUCH THINGS AS, "I DON'T SIN. YOU SIN. IT'S NOT MY FAULT. IT'S YOUR FAULT. IT'S MY PARENTS' FAULT. IT'S MY *SOCIAL UPBRINGING*. IT'S THE *JOB* I WORK AT AND THE *HOURS* I KEEP. IT'S THE *BAD BREAKS* I GOT IN LIFE." PEOPLE DON'T SEEM TO WANT TO ASK SIMPLY, "LORD, IS IT *I*? AM *I* THE TROUBLE IN THIS FOULED UP RELATIONSHIP?" JOHN CONCLUDES THAT DENYING SIN IS *NOT* A GOOD SOLUTION. HE WRITES, "IF WE SAY WE HAVE NO SIN, WE DECEIVE OURSELVES, AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN US" (1:8). IN FACT, *SELF-DECEPTION* IS THE WORST DECEPTION OF ALL BECAUSE IT KEEPS US FROM REPENTANCE AND READILY SUBMITTING TO CORRECTION.

SO, WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THE PROBLEM OF SIN? THE ANSWER THAT JOHN GIVES IS AMAZINGLY SIMPLE. THE ONE

WORKABLE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF SIN ISN'T ANYTHING YOU OR I CAN ACCOMPLISH BUT *FORGIVENESS*, AND IT BEGINS WITH *GOD'S* FORGIVENESS TOWARD US. JOHN WRITES, "IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, [GOD] IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS" (1:9).

YOU SEE, THE AMAZING, WONDERFUL, LIFE-CHANGING GOOD NEWS OF EASTER THAT JOHN WANTS US TO KNOW, WHICH BOTH CREATES AND SUSTAINS FELLOWSHIP BETWEEN US AND GOD AND BETWEEN US AND OTHER PEOPLE, IS THAT *GOD FORGIVES OUR SINS*, AND HE DOES SO *THROUGH JESUS CHRIST*, HIS ONLY SON, WHO SHED HIS BLOOD ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS AND THEN ROSE FROM THE DEAD ON THE THIRD DAY SO THAT WE MIGHT LIVE ETERNALLY WITH HIM.

TWO THINGS HAPPEN WHEN GOD FORGIVES OUR SINS: *ONE*, HE TAKES AWAY OUR SINS, AND *TWO*, HE PURIFIES US "FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS." IN OTHER WORDS, GOD REMOVES OUR HEART OF STONE AND PUTS A NEW SPIRIT AND NEW MOTIVES WITHIN US, WHICH GENUINELY WANT TO SERVE HIM AND DO WHAT IS RIGHT. IT'S WHAT DAVID PRAYED FOR IN PSALM 51 AND WHAT WE SING SOMETIMES FOR THE OFFERTORY. PLEASE JOIN ME: "CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD, AND RENEW A RIGHT SPIRIT WITHIN ME. CAST ME NOT AWAY FROM THY PRESENCE, AND TAKE NOT THY HOLY SPIRIT FROM ME. RESTORE UNTO ME THE JOY OF THY SALVATION, AND UPHOLD ME WITH A RIGHT SPIRIT IN ME" (VV 10-13).

WE WILL NEVER KNOW THE LIFE-CHANGING POWER OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS, HOWEVER, UNLESS AND UNTIL WE *REPENT*, CONFESSING OUR SINS AND TRUSTING IN GOD TO KEEP HIS PROMISE IN JESUS CHRIST. THE TRAGEDY OF UNCONFESSED SIN IS LIKE HAVING AN INFECTED FOOT AND REFUSING TO TAKE YOUR SHOE OFF SO THAT THE DOCTOR CAN TREAT IT. NOT ONLY THAT, BUT IT ALSO PUTS GOD IN A VERY BAD LIGHT. JOHN WRITES, "IF WE SAY WE HAVE NOT SINNED, WE MAKE [GOD] A LIAR," THAT IS, FALSE AND UNTRUE TO HIMSELF. GOD'S TRUE NATURE IS TO SHOW MERCY AND FORGIVENESS, AND HE CAN'T DO THAT AS LONG AS WE STUBBORNLY REFUSE TO ADMIT OUR SIN. BUT WHEN WE CONFESS OUR SINS, JOHN ASSURES US, GOD "IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSENESS" (1:9).

AS WE SHARE THE FORGIVENESS THAT JESUS MADE POSSIBLE FOR US BY HIS SUFFERING, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION, WE WILL ALSO DISCOVER CHANGES THAT TAKE PLACE BETWEEN US AND GOD AND BETWEEN US AND OTHER PEOPLE. FORGIVENESS TEARS DOWN WALLS BETWEEN PEOPLE. HUSBANDS AND WIVES, PARENTS AND CHILDREN SAY THINGS TO EACH OTHER LIKE, "I LOVE YOU. IT'S MY FAULT. I'M SORRY. IT'S OKAY." FORGIVENESS, EARNESTLY SOUGHT AND DAILY DEPENDED ON, CAN BREAK THE POWER OF SIN IN A PERSON'S LIFE. FORGIVENESS, AS GOD GIVES IT AND WE SHARE IT, HEALS WOUNDS, LIFTS SPIRITS, RESTORES FELLOWSHIP, GIVES

A SENSE OF FAMILY, AND MAKES POSSIBLE THE PEACE GOD WANTS US TO HAVE WITH HIM, WITHIN OURSELVES, AND WITH ONE ANOTHER. FORGIVENESS CROSSES OUT THE "I" IN SIN AND REPLACES IT WITH AN "O," WHICH REMINDS US OF GOD'S SON, WHO LOVED US AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR US.

AND THE WONDERFUL THING IS THAT THIS FORGIVENESS IS AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE, TO "THE WHOLE [INHABITED] WORLD" (2:2). JESUS MADE IT POSSIBLE BY HIS ATONING SACRIFICE ON THE CROSS AND BY HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD. WHAT A POWERFUL SOLUTION WE CHRISTIANS HAVE TO NEUTRALIZE THE DESTRUCTIVE EFFECTS OF SIN IN US AND THE WORLD AROUND US, AND WHAT A POWERFUL MESSAGE WE HAVE TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT GOD'S FORGIVENESS AVAILABLE TO THEM IN JESUS THE MESSIAH!

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, WE ARE SINFUL PEOPLE LIVING IN AN IMPERFECT WORLD IN WHICH SIN IS CONSTANTLY AFFECTING OUR LIVES AND THE LIVES OF OTHERS. BUT THE ANSWER TO SIN IS NOT TO DENY IT, TO MINIMIZE IT, OR TO INSIST ON PERFECTION. THE ONLY SOLUTION IS TO LIVE EACH AND EVERY DAY IN THE FORGIVENESS THAT GOD PROVIDES ALL PEOPLE IN OUR RISEN LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST, AND THEN TO SHARE THAT FORGIVENESS WITH OTHERS. SO, BELIEVE IN THE FORGIVENESS GOD GIVES YOU BY GRACE, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, THROUGH FAITH, AND SEE IF IT DOESN'T WORK WONDERS IN YOUR HEART, YOUR LIFE, AND YOUR FAMILY. PUT IT INTO PRACTICE, AND YOU WILL

UNDERTAND WHY JOHN WRITES: "WE WRITE THIS TO MAKE YOUR* JOY
COMPLETE" (1:4). AMEN.

* SOME MANUSCRIPTS