



EQSAINTS

The Community of the Beloved Disciple

Bible verses: 1 John 1:1-10

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life – for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

We are writing this so that our joy may be complete. Now this is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say, “We have fellowship with him,” while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

If we say, “We are without sin,” we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Ask everyone in the group to have their Bibles with them. Ask one person to read the passage out loud. Encourage them to have their pens and to underline things that strike them, especially later in the Bible when you go through the key words and phrases. Also, encourage them to make notes.

After the reading of the passage is complete, explain the context.

Context:

The letters we have from John (First, Second, and Third John), the Gospel of John, and probably the Book of Revelation stand out from the other books in the New Testament because the style of writing and the content itself is very different from what is seen in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, or Luke. St. Paul’s letters are also very different from what is seen in the Letters of John. These books in the Bible most likely came from a community or a school that has been called the “Community of the Beloved Disciple.”

In the Gospel of John, there is a character who is called “the Beloved Disciple” or the “Disciple whom Jesus loved,” who many believe to be John the Apostle. In the Gospel, he appears in moments of vulnerability. When Jesus tells the Apostles that one of them will betray him and at the foot of the cross, he is there. He is also with Peter when Mary Magdalene first tells that Jesus’s tomb is empty and during the last appearance of Jesus in the Gospel.

After the resurrection, there was a group of people who gathered around this Beloved Disciple to devote their lives more closely to Jesus. Some have said the Beloved Disciple was first a disciple of John the Baptist before meeting Jesus. Because of this, there seems to have been more disciples of John the Baptist who joined them. These two groups came together with the Beloved Disciple as their leader and they became a very close group. In the three letters of John and in the Gospel, love and the Holy Spirit are both talked about a lot. It seems that they were a very tight group who loved each other and who wanted to follow where the Holy Spirit led them. This may give an understanding as to why it is believed that this group moved together from the modern-day Holy Land to modern-day Greece.

They loved each other. They were led by the Spirit. They also experienced a lot of adversity. They probably left the area around Jerusalem because of the persecution they experienced from the Jewish people who did not believe in Jesus. Things don't seem to get too much better when they go to Greece. The opposition came from a different source, people who believed neither in Jesus nor the One God.

It didn't end there. Despite the love they had for each other and despite trying to follow where the Holy Spirit led them, relationships inside the community were also getting strained. This First Letter of John is being written to remind them of what they believe and what they believe is Jesus. The writer of the letter is reminding them that their love for one another is not based on anything that they made up. Instead, it comes from Jesus, the one that they heard, touched, and saw. Jesus was real and their way of life came from Him and not from anywhere else. The writer is calling them back to the basics of what it means to be a real Christian.

After explaining the context, ask some to read the passage to the group again. When the reader has finished, go back through and highlight the key words and phrases found below.

Key Words and Phrases:

- *Word*: Found in verse 1, the Greek word is “logos” (LOH-gohs). John could have used the word “rhema,” which refers to speech. Instead, he uses the word “logos,” which he uses in other places in reference to Jesus.
- *Fellowship*: Found in verse 3, the Greek word is “koinonia” (coin-oh-NEE-ah). It indicates “participation in.” It means a part of one lives within the other.
- *Light*: Found in verse 5, the Greek word is “phos” (FOHS). It means “to be radiant” or “to be a source of light.”
- *Darkness*: Found in verse 5, the Greek word is “skotia” (skoh-TEE-ah). The root means to come from “shadiness,” “obscurity” or “the shadows.”

- *Cleanse*: Found in verses 7 and 9, the Greek word is “katharos” (kahth-AHR-ohs). This is the source for the English word “catharsis,” which is the process of releasing and providing relief.
- *Forgive*: Found in verse 9, the Greek word is “aphē” (ah-FEE). The Greek sense of word to “go forth” or to “leave behind.” When forgiveness is given, the offender is not held bound. S/he can move forward and leave the offense behind.

Now you may provide the following interpretation.

Interpretation:

Even in the best Christian communities, things can go wrong. People outside the group can attack the group. People inside the group can begin to have friction between each other. Fights over who is right and who is wrong, accusations about who is a true Christian and who is a hypocrite: these are the kinds of things that strip the community that God desires.

Remember that this letter comes from the same person who wrote the Gospel of John. In John chapter 17, Jesus has a long prayer about the disciples who will follow Him after his death and resurrection. This prayer is that these followers would be one. It seems that even this community, the Community of the Beloved Disciple, was having real tension between the different members of the community. That is why the Beloved Disciple is writing to them to call them back to the basics.

He is going back to the beginning and that beginning is to Jesus Himself. Jesus has invited us to have fellowship with Him. This means that a part of Him lives inside of us and a part of us lives inside of Him. It also means that a part of us lives inside every other member of our group.

Since He is living inside of us and we live inside of Him, we cannot be afraid to have his light expose parts of our life that lie in the shadows. We don't need to be afraid of facing these parts of our life with Jesus or with each other. Jesus does two things. First, He forgives us. That means we come to Him and acknowledge what we have done wrong. When we tell Him about these things, we don't have to be afraid.

Second, he cleanses us. We have a catharsis. He holds them while we walk away from them. The sin stays. We go. It is no longer ours. All of us sin. This makes it easier to live in community with each other. Each of us has areas of our life that we struggle with.

Life in the Community of the Beloved Disciple was to be a community of acceptance and support. They were to have the courage to acknowledge their sins because they believed in his love for them and they had the love of the community. They lived within each other and they all lived within Christ Jesus.

Now you may lead a discussion using the following guide.

Application to Real Life:

- What are some things that you appreciate about the group of disciples that you most closely associate with?
- Have you seen anyone in your group actively try to maintain unity when there were tensions emerging? What happened?
- On a scale from 1 - 10 with 1 being incredibly difficult and 10 being incredibly easy, how difficult is it to admit when you have done something wrong?
- Even when you have asked God for forgiveness, do you find it hard to get over when you have done something wrong?
- What do you need to remember when you feel you are getting off track in your own relationship with God?

Closing Prayer:

Ask someone else to read the passage for a final time and then pray the following prayer.

Father of light, you have given Jesus to us. He is God from God and He is light from light. Help us not to be afraid for his light to expose the areas of our life that can cause us shame. Help us to accept each other when others trust us enough to share their life with us. Keep the bonds of our community strong so that we may love each other as you have loved us. We ask this through Christ who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.