

## A Letter from the elder

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Today(this morning) we come to the final letter from John. You thought last weeks letter was short, well this week's letter is even shorter.. only 218 greek words. But don't be too hopeful.. it doesn't mean that today will also be the shortest sermon. We'll see how I go and I'll do my best.

This postcard size letter normally gets lost in a sermon series and it gets forgotten about, but I think it's a mistake if we don't stop to have a look at this letter from the elder because 3 John has a great message. It's a letter full of personalities and they provide for us examples of what it means to walk in truth and love, Gaius example reminds us to work together for the truth, John gives us a negative model of walking in the truth in Diotrephes, and in this letter John encourages us to imitate the good so that we will be well spoken of by the truth like Demetrius.

One of the things that caught my attention as I read this letter was how the word truth kept appearing and how John was using it.

See in verse 1 To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth

Verse 3 it gave him great joy to hear about Gaius faithfulness in the truth.

Verse 4, he has no greater joy than to hear that his children are walking in the truth.

Verse 8 that we may work together for the truth and in verse 12 Demetrius is well spoken of by the truth.

So I want to pause for a second to remind ourselves what is meant by the truth here in our passage. Through John's books in the bible he uses the word truth in a variety of ways.

Here's some helpful statements that John has taught us about what the truth is. Jesus came from the Father full of truth, John testified that Jesus was the truth, and Jesus himself said that he was the truth. Jesus is God and Man who came to earth to save all humans from our sin, he is the truth that lives in each one of us, and he will be with us forever. And so truth in the John's letter is Jesus, it is the good news of Jesus. We've seen that John's concern in his letters has been

that those who believe in Jesus don't just say they believe but that it is seen in their actions. So he's encouraged us to live as Jesus did.

And so therefore Love and truth are to be seen in our everyday life.

Here in our 3<sup>rd</sup> letter we see truth and love in action. It's what I would call the practical part. And John has given us 3 examples for us to learn from.

## Walk in the truth

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The first person we meet after the elder is Gaius, whom John dearly loves. And it's clear that John loves and cares for Gaius in the way he writes to him. John loves him, he prays for him, John regards Gaius as one of his spiritual children. John is concerned for his spiritual health, and at the end of the letter John looks forward to meeting with him face to face.

Well what do we learn about Gaius?

We learn in verses 2-5 we learn that Gaius is being faithful to the truth, and he is continuing to walk in the truth.

What does it mean to walk in the truth? Well walking in this context represents how you live your life, and walking in the truth is to walk as Jesus did, by being faithful and obedient to God's instructions.

What does that look like? Well I can't fully describe what this looks like because walking in the truth can be expressed in many different ways. But there is a foundation of walking in the truth and walking in the truth requires obedience to God's commands, it requires that we love one another, it requires us to continue to know and understand the truth found in the Bible. The example that we see here in Gaius is that he is faithfully walking in the truth in the way that he loves and shows hospitality to the people around him.

Now before we delve into what hospitality looks like, I'd like to point out one thing that stood out for me in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4th verse. and that is the great Joy that John has in hearing about how Gaius was living. In verse 4 he says he has no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. What a statement! That's a pretty big claim. No greater joy than to hear that his children are walking in the truth. I think this comment of John's reveals a caring

heart- you see John's greatest joy is to see people come to know Jesus and to see them living in faithfulness to the Lord. It's his greatest joy because for John Jesus Christ is at the centre of his life, and Jesus powerfully shapes his thinking and his attitudes and his love for others. So that nothing could be better than to see other believers continue to walk in the truth. And this statement made me ask the question. What do I find joy in? What do you find joy in?

There are many good things that we can find joy in. Sitting out in the sun reading a book, spending time with our children, with our grandchildren or our nephews or nieces, or perhaps it's spending time all alone away from the kids, or perhaps it's playing and winning a type of sport competition, or drawing, or playing music, but what is it that you find greatest joy.

John challenges us doesn't he. As a parent what brings you the greatest joy? That your children receive top marks in the ATAR or university or that they've shown faithfulness to Christ in their lives? As a friend what brings you the greatest joy? That your friend has gotten a fantastic job the requires many hours of work and good pay or that they've shown faithfulness to Christ in their lives?

When we heard from Marshall about Victoria last week what did you feel? Was it in one ear and out the other? Did you rejoice that she has trusted in Jesus and although her journey has been up and down, she's continuing to trust in Jesus. Are our hearts joyful of that kind of news? John encourages us to have that same kind of Joy.

What shapes our attitudes, what shapes our heart? Is it the same as John? Is our greatest joy found in our brothers in and sisters in Christ faithfully continuing to walk in the truth, or is it found in something else?

## Work together for the Truth

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### Illustration

My family were missionaries in Malaysia for 10 years. My dad was the minister of Christ Church Likas. We finished there in 1989 and came back to Australia to live when I was 7. Even though it's been about 30 years since we've lived there, the church community there continue to show amazing amounts of love and hospitality to our family. I find it quite amazing. My parents in particular (but our

whole family is included) have been invited back to Sabah many times in the past 30 years, for big church anniversaries, for weddings. And they get looked after very well. I remember when I was about 14 and we went back for an anniversary celebration and we were there for 2 weeks. We were given free accommodation, and I don't tell a lie, but we were well looked after for food. We were invited by almost everyone in the church to have a meal with them, invited into their lives, into their homes. It meant that we had breakfast, then a second breakfast, then morning tea, then lunch, then afternoon tea, then dinner and then supper. For 2 whole weeks. It was no wonder I put on quite a few kg. But our friends in Malaysia they know how to show love and hospitality. And here in our passage in verses we see that John has heard that Gaius has been showing love and care for his brothers and sisters in Christ, for other believers, and even more they were strangers to him. A positive example of hospitality.

Who are these strangers? Well for the churches at this time it was common to have many believers who would travel to churches to proclaim the name of Jesus. They were like missionaries. In the days of Gaius, the missionaries would be quite reliant upon people to give them food, accommodation, to give them supplies for their everyday needs. The pagans weren't going to support them,

they would have most likely even opposed them, and so it was up to the little churches and their people to give them support. And John encouraged Gaius to send them on their way in a manner that honours God. That's a big job for Gaius. He was to treat these guests as though it was God who had stopped and visited at his home. Be generous in your hospitality towards these men, is what John is encouraging.

VERSE 8 – why do we show hospitality? Because Gaius and the strangers(his brothers and sisters in Christ) are working together for the truth, it is for the sake of the NAME – Jesus Christ. This is what motivates Gaius to show hospitality. If no one showed hospitality towards these strangers, then their ministry would not be possible.

What is hospitality? What is your understanding of what hospitality is? Is it about inviting people over to your house for a meal? Well that may be part of hospitality but we shouldn't stop there. Because for the early church hospitality was much broader than pleasant meals with friends. It included meals, but also accommodation and taking care of a travellers every material need. I think perhaps we're comfortable in doing this for family and close friends. But I wonder would we be willing to accommodate a stranger whom we met at church? Or a homeless person? Or what about a refugee family? Do we step



out of our comfort zone to help migrants settle into a new place, help with resumes, finding a job?

Now I'm not saying that each one of us has to be involved in all these different kinds of hospitality. Because our capacity for hospitality will vary at different times throughout our lives. But I think it's something that we should think and be challenged about. Christine Pohl is a person who has done lots of research into hospitality in the Christian tradition, and she says that we may be overwhelmed by the prospect of hospitality to strangers because we have become dependant on large-scale institutions and specialists in almost every area of life. And although they do important work, Christine says that hospitality requires both personal and communal aspects of public and private life.

However we might feel about hospitality, and whatever our capacity might be, the first step in making a place for hospitality is to make room in our hearts, so that we may always seek a humble attitude of generous, outreaching love towards others. Pray that you might have the love to show to the people around you, including strangers. If we are walking in the truth, then it will be expressed in the way that we love and show hospitality.

Now I want to encourage us as a whole church. We as a church do show love and hospitality. We especially see it in the way that we partner with our

missionaries, whether it's welcoming them here at church or being able to financially help to send them off to do their work. When we have visitors come to our church we see people be welcomed. I have personally seen people open up their homes to people who are in need, I have seen people offer help even when they themselves are going through tough times. I do see it, so please don't hear me say that we aren't doing hospitality well. But I think we always have areas to improve. Do you remember our pictogram that Marty uses to encourage us to be generous with our money? I'd like to encourage each one of us to think about how we can take that one step more in being more loving and hospitable. Begin with the people here in our church? Are there people in this service that you've never spoken to before? How about introducing yourself to them. Perhaps it's inviting people over to your place for a meal, what about being prepared to have a meal after church on Sundays so that you're ready to invite people who are visiting that day? Perhaps it's preparing a room in your house and waiting expectantly for a stranger to come and use. Do you know what I'd love to see in our church, I'd love to see that whenever a missionary comes to visit us whether they are friends or strangers – I'd love us to have a long list of people wanting to have them over for lunch after the service.

Because the people of Waitara Anglican church want to show love and

hospitality to all who enter in our doors, and especially to our fellow partners in ministry.

Now we could spend a whole lot of time on the topic of hospitality, but I hope you can see the importance of hospitality for John.

One of the ways that we show that we are walking in the truth, is to show love and hospitality to the people around us, to both friends and strangers.

Now, John writes about a negative example of hospitality- a man named Diotrephes. He is not welcoming the apostle John, and he is also spreading malicious nonsense about him. And not only that but he is not welcoming other believers, and not only that but he's kicking out church members who are being welcoming. John encourages Gaius not to be influenced by the negative Diotrephes. And it's easy to be influenced by the people around you isn't it? Even when we know it's a bad example, we can still be influenced. I remember when I was 15 years old, I went on a camp for a week, where I heard almost every second word as being a swear word. I remember coming home from that camp and it had influenced the way I spoke, I had to begin putting money in a swear jar, and that was only after one week of influence. So John warns Gaius, do not imitate Diotrephes as he is the total opposite of what John encourages,

do not be influenced by him. We see Diotrephes not working together for the truth, but as we read in verse 9 he is working for himself, for he loves to be first.

So if Diotrephes is not to be a person to imitate, then John writes of a man named Demetrius who is a good person to imitate.

## Be Well spoken of by the truth

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### Illustration

As a piano player I've had about 12 years of music studies, I've studied the theory books and also the practical. I've also taught a few kids how to play the piano. I'd like to hope that these kids and their parents would be able to speak well of me so that when they talk to others about their experience of me as a piano teacher, it's shown that I've followed the correct piano rules and music theory. And also when the child studies for themselves music theory it will also verify that I've been obedient to the theory of music – they will know that this note is a C not G. So that not only will others have spoken well of me, so too has the music theory books.

And this what John means when he writes in verse 12 about Demetrius that He is well spoken of by everyone – and it's even by the truth itself. Demetrius in the way that he has lived his life is seen by the people around him, and the truth shows that he has been obedient and faithful to the God's word.

There are two things that we can learn in these verses about Demetrius.

First is that it is important for us to have good role models around us in which we can imitate. Of course our ultimate person to imitate is Jesus our Lord. But God has also put people in our lives that we can imitate. It is how we learn and mature, it is how we are encouraged, it is how we continue walking in the truth.

Who are the people around you? Who is encouraging you in your walk as a Christian? Is it someone in your bible study group? Is it someone here at church? Find someone who you think could be a good role model for you, for your family, form a relationship with them and imitate them. I remember when I was in a bible study a few years back, and I really respected the leaders of this particular group. They were a young couple with one child, and a baby on the way. We used to have dinner together before bible study and I loved it because we were always welcomed into their family time. We saw the ups and downs they had, life wasn't always magazine perfect when we entered their house, their meals wasn't Michelin star food, but as I spent time with them, I learnt a

lot from them. I could clearly see that what they taught from the bible was also real in their lives. I saw it in the way that they loved each other, how they loved us, and also how they loved their children. There have been many different role models that I've had in my life who have encouraged and influenced me in my walk as a Christian. It is important that we have good role models and I encourage all of us to have them in our lives. If you can't see any in your life at the moment I encourage you to pray that God might bring into your life people that will encourage you in your walk with Christ. Get to know the people in our church and look for someone who could be a good role model and begin a relationship with them. Invite them over for a meal or go have a coffee with them.

The second thing for us to learn from Demetrius is to examine our own life. And ask the question Does God's truth speak well of us? Do people around us speak well of us? Can we be good role models to the people around us? Are we walking in the truth, are we showing love and hospitality in the way we live? Sure As we walk in our Christian journey we will have bumps and hills and valleys, but are we striving to be obedient in following Jesus?

This 3<sup>rd</sup> letter of John's is challenging but encouraging isn't it? in his encouragement of Gaius, he also encourages us to Walk in the truth, to work

together for the truth, and as we imitate the Lord Jesus and do what is good, we pray that our lives will be well spoken of by the others and of the truth.

Let me Pray