

Two truths and two lies

1 John 1.1-10

The last time I was caught lying
was when I was undergoing psychological evaluation.

When you put up your hand to be an Anglican minister,
they send you to the psychologist to see how crazy you really are
and the assessment includes an hour-long interview with a psychologist.

He was interested in my childhood, asking about my experience at school.
Now, *the truth* is that I didn't like school very much at all,
But I didn't want to show what I thought might be a weakness
So my answer was along the lines of "*Sure, school was fine!*"
and then the psychologist moved on and asked about other things.

A few weeks later I was reading his report (which we were encouraged to do),
and he said "*When I asked Martin about school he gave a dismissive response.
There is more to the story than what he is letting on.*"
And I thought to myself "*This guy is good!!!*" – and serves me right!
I don't know how he knew—maybe I looked up and to the left—
But he knew.

In a sense, it was his job to know.
As an expert in human behaviour it's his job to pick up on when we are lying.
And you know who else has a responsibility to discern truth from error?
We Christians do.
Those of us who are members of God's church,
We are called to discern between those things about God *that are true*,
and those things about God *which are false*.

Today we begin a new series in the NT letters of John,
and the first letter, 1 John, is written to a group of Christians
who are being called to exercise their discernment.
In Ch 2 John says I am writing these things to you
about those who are trying to lead you astray.

John is aware that there is a battle for the hearts and minds of his flock,
a battle between truth and error
and so like Christians of all ages
the recipients of this letter are being called to make some judgments.

But in order to make a judgment you need a reference point, don't you?
I got off the train at Chatswood earlier this week and was trying to find my
way up to the highway but found myself completely lost.

It wasn't until I found a street sign— a fixed point rooted in the ground—that I was able to make the correct turns and avoid the wrong ones. What is our reference when it comes to true knowledge about God?

John provides our fixed point in the opening verses.

That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we have *looked at* and our hands have *touched*—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have *seen it* and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³We proclaim to you what we have *seen* and *heard*

The message that John wants to tell us is based in a physical reality.

John isn't simply promoting an interesting human philosophy.
He's not like a guru who's sharing his own personal enlightenment;
John has actually *seen* something, his teaching is based on something *real*.

Look at all the senses that he makes mention of here.

Four times in these verses he says that he has *seen* something.
Twice he says he's *heard* something,
At one point he's said that he's even *touched* it.

If John were alive today, I reckon we'd call him a man of science,
Just like a scientist will sit with her notebook
and write down what she sees, hears and smells,
so too John has written down what he has seen, heard and touched.
The thing that's driving John is not made up or imagined,
it's based on *real events* that happened in *real time* to *real people*.

So what is it that he's seen?

Well, it's not so much a '*what*' as a '*who*'
Someone has appeared, who is described as
the eternal life, who was with the Father but has now appeared to us.

This is John's way of describing Jesus; the Son of our Father in Heaven.

Jesus is the one who lives forever,
Jesus is the one through whom eternal life can be passed on to us.

And as he walked with Jesus as one of his twelve apostles,

John would have seen and heard some remarkable things:
he would have heard Jesus claim that he is only way to the Father;
he would have seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead.
Most importantly, he would have seen Jesus alive again after his crucifixion.
Just like the other apostles, John was an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus.

This is why John is so keen to have his readers join in fellowship with him,

take a look at verse 3: We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Scholars think that the word *fellowship*
was being thrown around by the false teachers
who were trying to lead John's friends astray.
They were saying "*join in fellowship with us.*"

But John is resolute:

No! he says, you must maintain your fellowship with me and with those like me, because we're the ones who have the truth, we witnessed the life of Jesus, we're the ones who actually have fellowship with God the Father and the Son, You've got to stick with us!

If someone asks you what kind of church you attend,
what kind of answers might you give?
You might say you attend an Anglican church, or an English speaking church,
you might say you attend church with a variety of ages and cultures.
All those answers would be correct!
And you could also say you attend an *apostolic* church.
We are a church that is based upon the teaching of the Apostles;
those 12 leaders, including John, who knew Jesus from first hand experience.

And the great thing about being an apostolic church
is that we can have *absolute confidence* in what we believe.
Why? Because it's teaching that's based on first-hand observations.
John and his friends *saw* Jesus, they *heard* Jesus and they *touched* him.

Sometimes you might wonder whether you've picked the right team!
Do you ever wonder *Gosh, maybe the Muslims are right! Maybe the atheists!*
Or maybe you console yourself by having an each way bet,
and you buy into the lie which says that *all religions are the same really!*

John wants to set us straight,
Jesus is the path to eternal life, he says, we've seen him, and we know it's true!!!

So now that we know our reference point—now that we know the *source* of truth—
what kind of direction does John point us towards?

Well, in verses 5-10 we have two great truths about God
and two corresponding lies that we can tell ourselves.
John wants us to help us discern truth from falsehood,
and he starts with one of the most basic truths of all.
Verse 5: This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you:
God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

What does John mean when he says that God is light?

In the ancient world the concept of light was used in different ways.

Light was symbolic of truth and knowledge,

Light was also symbolic of all that was good and upright and trustworthy,

I suspect that it's in this second sense

that John is using light as a description of God:

he means that God is *good* and *loving* and *kind* and *caring* and *trustworthy*.

Have you ever found yourself misjudging another person's character?

I remember as a high school student on the first day of the school year

Lining up out the front of our commerce class room, waiting for our teacher,

And then down the corridor came two teachers,

the youthful graduate and the older department head,

we knew which one we wanted,

and we were so disappointed when the youthful graduate kept on walking

and it was the old department head who stopped at our class! So strict! So

boring! But of course, she was a great teacher!

And I think it's also very easy to have low expectations of God.

He's not really interested in me, He's not interested in my problems,

or maybe he is interested but he's a hard task master, a bit cruel, a bit tough.

Some people assume that if he does exist, then he must actually be quite evil.

John wants us to hear a different message:

despite our assumptions, God is light. And then he emphasises the point:

in him there is no darkness *at all* — within God there is not even a hint of any callousness or cruelty or indifference or nastiness. If we think that there might be traces of these negative characteristics, then we have failed to understand him properly. God is light, this is the first truth John has for us.

But aside from truths, there are also lies that John wants us to be able to discern,

the first being the idea that, although God is light,

it's ok for us to continue living in darkness.

Verse 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness,

we lie and do not live out the truth.

John is exposing what can be a sad contradiction:

It's the contradiction of someone who is claiming to follow a God of light

but who's own life is shrouded in darkness

Someone who is claiming to follow the holy and pure God

but who is allowing all kinds of sin to take root in their heart.

I wonder whether you've ever visited one of the really big art galleries of the world,

like the Louvre in Paris, or the Metropolitan in New York.

These are places where you can see paintings by all the famous guys:

Rembrandt, Picasso and so on. When I've visited, I've been astounded at the

output that some of these artists were capable of. Hundreds of paintings, some of them massive in scale. I thought to myself "*these guys mustn't have slept!*" But then I learnt that many of these masters were running studios with a bunch of apprentices and assistants, all of whom had learnt to paint like the master, that's how they produced so much.

And in the Christian life the same principle is at play,
we are each called to be like the master,
to step out of darkness and to live in the light, just as God is light.

And if we take this step out of darkness, then there are two great benefits,
Verse 7: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
Walking in light is a great promoter of fellowship with one another.
It doesn't take a lot of reflection to see why.
If light consists of things such as *kindness* and *trustworthiness* and *care*
and if darkness consists of *cruelty* and *indifference* and *selfishness*,
then of course our fellowship with one another is going to benefit.

And the second benefit is that we won't undermine our salvation.
John links our stepping out of the darkness with our purification from sin,
I think what he's getting at is to say
that the salvation provided by the cross must result in a changing life.
If we insist on staying in the darkness while claiming fellowship with God,
then a question will be raised over whether we really have been purified.
Darkness is not the Christian way. To believe otherwise is to believe a lie.

This leads to our next great truth about God,
and that's the truth that God does indeed purify us from sin.
Verse 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

On the particular holiday when Jas and I visited the Louvre,
we also visited a museum that was at one stage a medieval hospital.
It was built on top of a small creek, and the creek is where the hospital used to ditch all its waste. Can you imagine what that creek must have been like, with human blood and waste continually tipped into it? These days the creek has been cleaned up and the water is crystal clear, greenery on its banks, trout swimming up the stream, you can bend down and drink your fill. It's been purified.

And John says God can apply the same work of purification to our own hearts.
John knows this purification is available
because he saw it happen in the ministry of Jesus.
Adulterers and thieves alike were met with kindness and forgiveness
and the chance to become new people.

And for those of us today who know the truth about our own sinful impurity,
then that same purification can be ours if we ask for it.

But not everyone does ask for it, not everyone recognises that they are sinful.

The final lie that John would have us recognise
is the lie which says that forgiveness isn't necessary.

V 10: If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.
If we are so bold to say we are sinless, then were saying Christ is a liar;
that he was mistaken to announce the need for repentance and salvation,
and that his death was a needless waste.
Christ recognised sin as a reality, and so should we.

I think one of our blind spots as Christians is that our definition of sin can slip.

We grant ourselves permission to let go of God's standards
we tell ourselves that God only cares about some actions and not others
We allow ourselves to keep one vice
because we think that it's countered by another virtue that have,
We think of God's grace as the *permission to sin*
rather than as the *forgiveness of sin* that leads to repentance,
and so its in these subtle ways that we can deny the sin that is in our lives.

How do we get to this point? I think its because, as John says, his word is not in us.

It's because we are not hearing the truth about God's hatred of sin.
God's word will remind us that yes, God does hate *lying*, he hates *sexual sin*,
he hates *greed*, and *violence*, and *destructive language*, and *corruption*.
And so God's word reminds us that we are in need of his purification,
And it can be ours, if we start treating sin as seriously as he does.

I've said that there are two truths and two lies,

maybe there's only two *truths* we need to know:
God is the God of pure light who purifies us, and sin has no place with us.
And friends, I think there is great power if we take these two truths seriously.

We live in a world where truth isn't valued.

In the media world there is a new job: you can work as a factchecker.
These are people who check the words of public figures
and of other news sources
with the expectation that much of what we hear is not trustworthy.

And it's into this world that we can shine as people of the truth,

As people who live consistently in light of the truths we proclaim.
Just this week I've see research indicating
that the thing most likely to attract an outsider to a religious faith
is a life that genuinely reflects the values of that faith.
People are attracted to those who not only know the truth, but live it.
So let's ask God for his help.