

Text: 1 John 1.1-7
St Stephen's

Feb 14/15, 2009
Sat PM/Sun AM

Plus Ultra: The Life Grace Makes

I have spent much of the last month carrying **a special burden**; a 15 year friend of mine, a pastor of a large parish in Fla, and a member of a covenant group in have been in for 13 years admitted to adultery and was removed from ministry. It has been heartbreaking. Crushing for his church, for his family, and for him. It has been headline news in his community and beyond for weeks. Of course. And all of us know too many stories like this story, of leaders and of friends who have failed.

Those of us who have been his closest friends are trying to help. And we are also **asking hard questions** about our friendship and about the nature of our long years in fellowship.

Why didn't we have any idea of this?

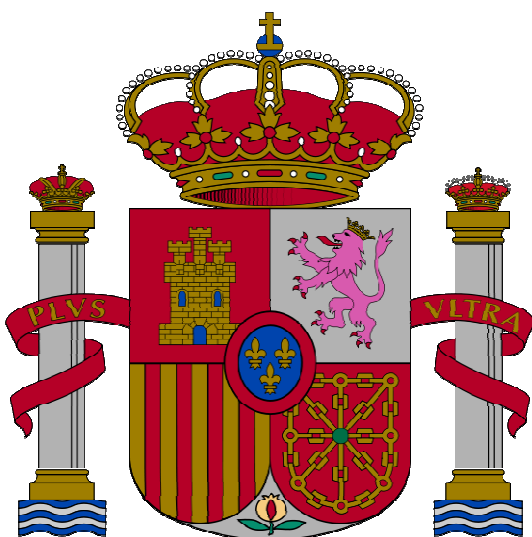
Could not our fellowship have been the place where this could have been caught early and healed deeply? Why wasn't it?

And I have some other questions.

Why does this happen so much?

Why aren't we turning out more leaders who are men and women of deep Christlikeness.

Why aren't we all men and women of deep Christlikeness?



This is the national **shield of Spain**. Two weeks ago we looked at the **pillars** on the right and the left. These were known in ancient times as the Pillars of Hercules, ancient rock formations that bordered the straits of Gibraltar, connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Note that around them is a **banner** with a single Latin word on the left and a second on the right; together they read, '**Plus Ultra**'.

The original phrase on those pillars had a third word, "**Non**" - it was a somber warning in Latin, 'Non Plus Ultra: nothing more beyond'. But you remember your grade school rhymes: 'In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue...' and discovered the lands in which we now live. It turned out there was more beyond, and the two word phrase became Spain's national motto.

In the month of Feb, as we move through the realignment in Anglicanism, we are asking you to reach for 'More Beyond' in your own walk with the Lord. We are asking that this church become a 'More beyond' place.

Last week we had **Mario Bergner** come and visit with us. Mario is a 'more beyond' guy. Many of you remember his story from his visit years ago. He was caught for years in the **gay movement**, in sexual brokenness, as he prefers to call it, and he **threw himself at the feet of Jesus**. Healing came, and that was decades ago and Mario and Nancy have been married for 20 years and have 5 wonderful kids - and he has dedicated his life to a **nationwide ministry** to people who have been caught in sexual brokenness of all kinds. And there isn't a family here who hasn't had to deal with that at home or in these communities, because that is the world we live in. **Mario is a 'more beyond' guy.**

Today we are continuing to touch base with our vision, and we are looking at one of the most profound paragraphs in the NT, 1 John 1.

The **situation** John was facing is familiar territory. The church was **stuck**, and Christians do get stuck, buffeted with **false teaching** and **division** about **fundamental matters of the faith** – about the nature of God, about the identity of Jesus, about the impact of the gospel.

How do we get unstuck? We go **back to the beginning!** John takes us back in his first paragraphs...

Vs 1: The one who existed from the beginning...

He is referring to Jesus

Vs 2: The one who is life was revealed to us...

Vs 2: *We proclaim to you that he is the one...*

What is the result of this? John uses an important word...

Vv 3-4: *So that you may have fellowship with us...*

The word for '**fellowship**' here is '**koininia**', which means 'common life'.

And all this happens...

Vs 4: *so that you may fully share our joy*

So let me try and **put it in some simple phrases**.

The one who existed before the dawn of time, the one who is life itself, **stepped into this world**, into time and space and human history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He came because God sent him. He came for us. **Who he was** became slowly apparent by what he did and what he said, and then dramatically apparent by how he died and how he rose.

And at every step along this remarkable series of events, he had alongside him **witnesses**, who **saw** and **heard** and **touched** him. Who knew him. And who have carefully and honestly and faithfully told us about him.

And **as we believed** their message about this Jesus, we found ourselves swept **into this family**, this **fellowship**, this church where God shares his life with us and we share this life with each other and where **his joy runs loose** in our midst!

His very next sentence puts it in a different way:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

1 John 1:5

When he says '**God is light**', he means that God is **holy**, he is pure, he is good. He is without fault or corruption. He is faithful, and true; he never lies. He **shines** in the **darkness** - and darkness flees. He brings his light on the **sick** and they are healed, on the **dead**— and they come to life and grow. **God is light.**

John will go on to say a **second** simple and profound thing about God in the 4th chapter of this letter. He will write, '**God is love.**'

'*God is Light*' 1 John 1.5

'*God is Love*' 1 John 4.8,16

Together these two little sentences say a great deal, they are the **twin statements** of God that can be said and must be said when we speak of God...

He is holy and good and righteous and true. He is light

He is merciful and compassionate and tender and forgiving. He is love

Then John talks about **how we live in this koininia of light and love.**

He says,

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 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 cleanses us from all sin

1 John 1.6-7

He compares **walking in the darkness** with **walking in the light.**

Walking in darkness means keeping the light away from your life. We are good at that. It is **hiding** things, and **misleading** people, and **blaming** others, and **avoiding** the issues, and being **dishonest** about what is going on inside you.

Walking in the light means opening yourself up to the light. It is **honesty** and **truth** and **confession** and **repentance** and **forgiveness** and **humility** and **mercy** and **tenderness** and a **new start**. It is the blood of Jesus washing more and more deeply until 'all sin' is washed and cleansed and forgiven and healed. **George Macdonald** says, "*He will forgive anything. He will overlook nothing.*" That is what happens when you are walking in the light. **It reveals, and it heals. And reveals, and heals...**

We have a chance as we go through this realignment to build **a different kind of diocese, and a different sort of parish – a more beyond parish.**

In the **diocese** the Bishop has now asked every priest to be in a circle of **accountability and support, of light and of love.**

I am in a longstanding **group of about 8 clergy.** We were larger – there were 12 of us, but some stayed behind in the Episcopal Church. We decided that we **want to do things different now.** We have been researching **the history of accountability** in groups:

To get into Wesley's Methodist Small Groups (mid-1700's)

5. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?
6. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
7. Do you desire to be told of **all** your faults, and that plain and home?
8. Do you desire that every one of us should tell you from time to time whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?
9. Consider! Do you desire that we should tell you whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear, concerning you?
10. Do you desire that in doing this we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?
11. Is it your desire and design to be on this and all other occasions entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart, without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?

Every Meeting:

4. To speak, each of us in order, freely and plainly the true state of our souls without the faults we have committed in thought, word, or

deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.

To a 15 year old covenant that focused on friendship and encouragement and sharing and united action for the gospel, we added a new paragraph last December:

To pursue lives that are marked by Christian spiritual growth, especially by a whole-life surrender to the Lord Jesus, by holiness of character, by humility towards God, by faithfulness in family and ministry, and by genuine love towards all. In our time together we will be ready to give and receive encouragement towards these ends.

"As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend." (Pro 27.17)

We've been drawing up a list of questions we want to be accountable to each other about when we meet.

Here are some on our list:

- Have you been with a woman anywhere this past month in a way that might be seen as compromising?
- Have any of your financial dealings lacked integrity?
- Have you exposed yourself to any explicit sexual material or temptation?
- Have you spent adequate time in Bible Study and prayer?
- Have you given priority to your marriage and children?
- Have you fulfilled the mandates of your calling?
- Have you just lied to me?

Is there anywhere in your life that is a circle of light, and a circle of love?

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 cleanses us from all sin

Prayer: draw us into circles of light and of love, of truth and grace, where you reveal and heal and reveal and heal...