

## “A Life Revealed”

Pastor Dave Carlson  
First Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, April 15, 2012

### Old Testament Lesson: Revelation 21:22-27 New Testament Lesson: 1 John 1:1-7

Author Robert Fulghum once asked his instructor at the Institute for Reconciliation, on the last day of class, “What is the meaning of life?” He was joking, of course, but his instructor, Dr. Alexander Papaderos, was not. He pulled out a small round piece of mirror that he had found shattered on the road as a young boy and proceeded to tell how he used to delight in shining its reflective light into “... dark places where the sun would never shine – in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me”, he said, “to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find. “He kept the little mirror, growing up,” he said, “and would take it out in idle moments and continue the game. “As I became a man, he said” I grew to understand that this was not just a child’s game but a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of light. But light – truth, understanding, knowledge – is there, and it will only shine in many dark places as I reflect it.” Papaderos continued, “I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world – into the black places in the hearts of men – and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life.”<sup>1</sup>

The First letter of John also answers the question, “What is the meaning of life?” when it says, “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.” ***The meaning of life is found in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ as reflected in the grace and mercy of our fellowship with one another.***

Today, in the second of our three sermons touching on that which gets in between us and God, we will unpack this statement about fellowship with God, through Christ, as shared with one another. Fellowship in Christ is different from any other type of fellowship. First John says, “We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ.” So, the first thing we notice about true fellowship is that it’s based in God. As humans, though, we come at it backwards, or at least roundabout. Our first real encounter with another human being is our mother and/or father – whoever it is that we bond with as a parent, that’s our first sense of fellowship. And for most of us, it’s pretty idyllic – peaceful, calm, tranquil, pleasant, even heavenly – or at least that’s what we hope and/or imagine. But soon, things change. As a baby, a child, a teen, and into adulthood, we discover over and over again that all our needs aren’t being met when and how we want them. And our sense of fellowship breaks down. We get upset. We have fights and disagreements. We feel neglected, or maybe we feel superior. Whatever it is, we come to know that the world is made up of “me” and “the other,” “us” verse “them.” And that “my” need doesn’t always correspond with the “other’s” desire or ability to meet my need. Or, that the plans we

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Fulghum, *It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It*, (New York: Random House, 1989).

have for “our” resources – our time, talents and treasures – don’t always correspond to the needs of “others,” you know, those people who stand on our doorstep and say, “What about us? Aren’t we God’s children, too? Where is your Christian fellowship with us?!?”

And we say to them, “We’re doing the best we can, with God’s help.” But to be sure we are indeed doing the best we can, we continually need to ground ourselves in God, through worship, prayer, study and fellowship. First John tells us that the early Christians came to know God through Jesus Christ and in fellowship with one another. “We declare to you,” says the letter, “what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us.”

This was written by those who knew Jesus Christ in the flesh and witnessed his death and resurrection.<sup>2</sup> And what God revealed to them then – what God reveals to us today – is that Jesus Christ is the light of life by which we come to see God most clearly.

Theologian P.T. Forsyth speaks of this when he writes, “In a man’s religious experience (or a woman’s) we can trace two vertical and personal movements: **God seeking man**, and **man in his turn responding** obediently to that revelation. Now transfer all this **to Christ**. Think of (Jesus) in terms ... of a union of these two personal movements (God seeking humankind and us in turn responding). In other words, if **we stand at the bottom of the cross** and look up **toward God**, Jesus Christ is **the horizontal plane** where God and humankind meet. So, no matter what gets in between us and God, Christ is there to bridge the gap, if we truly seek fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. And if we don’t, then not only does our fellowship with God suffer, but our true fellowship (our God-given fellowship) with one another is non-existent. We become the “us’s” verses the “them’s,” the “me” – the “you” – who is always to some degree at odds with “the other,” at odds with those people, places and things in our lives that get in between us and God.

What’s missing in all of these “us’s” and “them’s” and “me’s” and “you’s” and “others” is ... “we” – **the “we” of true fellowship. That’s what God celebrates; That’s what allows God to shine the brightest in our eyes.**

True fellowship is like what Lloyd John Ogilvie shared about a young Korean who was learning the English language. He came upon the word “fellowship” and said, “I understand that. It means fellows in the same ship.”<sup>3</sup> We are, indeed, all in the same boat, facing the same struggles in life, the same limitations, the same temptations, the same choices. The question is, are we in that boat together or apart? And what do we do in relationship to one another when that boat runs aground?

Three guys are stranded on a desert island when they find a magic lantern containing a genie, who grants them each one wish. The first guy wishes he were off the island and back home. The second guy wishes the same thing. The third guy says, “I’m lonely. I wish my friends were back here.”<sup>4</sup> Now that’s a guy who is in it just for himself. That’s someone who has really missed the boat when it comes to true fellowship. Because that person has no clue about what connects one person with

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<sup>2</sup> Scholars estimate First John was written near the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century and Jesus is believed to have died near 38 AD.

<sup>3</sup> As referenced by Hal Brady, 14 November 1993, Dallas, Texas.

<sup>4</sup> “Laugh at these jokes or we’ll shoot the receptionist,” GQ, June 1999, 250.

another – that horizontal beam in the cross of Jesus that creates a place where God and humankind can meet.

When we are on that plane in life, when we stand on that cross beam, when we seek to live our lives in and through Jesus Christ, there is no struggle or limitation that can separate us from God or one another. But we don't always stand there, do we? We don't always live in Jesus Christ and center our lives on God. Too often, we get self-centered instead of God-centered, even in the church. Someone who had a notion as to why this is was Richard Halverson, U.S. Senate Chaplain in the late 1990s, he said, "In the beginning, the church was a fellowship of men and women who centered their lives on the living Christ. They had a personal relationship with the Lord. It transformed them and the world around them.

Then the church moved to Greece, where it became a philosophy. Later it moved to Rome, where it became an institution. Next it moved to Europe, where it became a culture. Finally it moved to the United States, where it became an enterprise. We've got far too many churches," said Halverson, "and so few fellowships."<sup>5</sup>

The apostle John knew what it was to be in a true fellowship, one that overcomes and transcends any and all struggles and limitations of our human existence. And he sought to share the joy of that fellowship with others – by reaching out to those of his own day and age, those at the farthest corners of his world, and by reaching out to those of us here in this sanctuary across the vast expanse of time and space. The First Letter of John was written, as it says, so "that you also may have fellowship with us (with them); and truly our fellowship (which is beyond time and space) truly our fellowship says First John, "is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ".

Through Christ, we share in the joy of those who knew Jesus in the flesh and witnessed his death and resurrection – the joy of being in fellowship with God, through Jesus Christ, as reflected in the grace and mercy of our fellowship with others. If we make God the basis of our fellowship with one another and with others, and make Jesus Christ the model and vehicle through which this fellowship comes to life, then we, too, can transcend the limitations of human interactions – all those things that get in between us and God and one another – and in so doing we can come to know the joy of a truly divine fellowship here in our church and in all of life.

**Amen.**

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Karl A. Pohlhaus in his religion column for The Glendale Star [Arizona], July 16, 1998, C5.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Everlasting God, we give you our thanks and praise! Christ is risen! And we are an Easter people, blessed by your miracle of life after death. All our hope and trust is in your grace and mercy, O God. Out of darkness comes light; out of despair comes new promise.

We come to you, O God, ever ready with petitions for what we want and things we think we need. Free us in these moments of prayer from our litany of desires ... and open our hearts to receive your gifts of grace and love. And help us, O God, to share the gifts of your spirit with others: to remember that where two or three of us are gathered, you are there also; Help us to remember that we are messengers of your love and grace, which calls us to extend the hand of fellowship not only within these walls, but beyond; Help us to remember above all that the cross is a radical commitment to a way of life, and we carry it in the name of Christ, our Lord.

As we journey alongside Christ in service to you, fill our lives with a joy that is beyond understanding, remove our doubts with a faith that is deep and whole. Heal our spirits with your song of hope. It is good to celebrate our faith together and the good gift of life beyond death that is a blessing beyond imagination! Thanks to you, our God and our Savior, in whose name we pray as you taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

**Amen.**