

Third Sunday of Easter  
April 15, 2018

Text: 1 John 3:1-12

Theme: “Keep it Up”

“Keep it Up!” This could be good or bad—depends on what one is trying to keep up. “Keep up the good work! You are performing your job very well; others could learn from you.” “Keep up your practicing. Your hard work and diligence on the piano can be heard.” “Keep on checking on your neighbor. You have been a real help to him. If you were to stop, it’s hard to say what would happen.” Now for the flip side: “Keep that up and you will be out of a job.” “Keep on with that poor attitude and you’ll never graduate.” “Keep up your lying and no one will ever trust you.”

In our text we have the contrast from keeping up the practice of sin or keeping up the practice of righteousness. One is good, wonderful, with many blessings. The other is horrible, rotten to those around such a person and to the one who is honing his unrighteous skills.

First John is an appeal, and exhortation, to keep it up, keep up, keep on walking in the light of the truth. Don’t be tippy toeing and plunging into the darkness. It has been the judgment of the church down through the ages that this letter, and the two that follow it, are the work of the Apostle John. It was likely received by those brothers and sister in and around Ephesus where John spent many, many years. It is thought that he worked in Ephesus before his exile to Patmos and likely returned to Ephesus to live out his days. These three letters would seem to have been written during a period of his absence from Ephesus. Were they sent by the Apostle from Patmos? Was he actually at Ephesus and they were sent from there to the surrounding churches to distribute the words of an aging

Apostle, even the last of the Twelve, for whom travel had become very difficult? We don't really know the answers to this questions. But we do have the message, the witness of John right before us.

There are those who have not kept it up, that is walking in the light. Some had departed from the truth of Jesus. There were those who seemed to be denying that Jesus had actually come in the flesh. He was not a real human being. But we'll get to that false teaching in a couple of weeks. Our text for today deals with venturing into the darkness in a different way. John has already told us God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all (1:5). If someone walks in the darkness, and says, "hey, look how tight I am with God," he's a liar. On the other hand, if we say we are all light, no darkness, then we're liars too, even calling God a liar. Walking in the darkness of sin, going deeper and deeper down that path means the depths of death even damnation.

Christ came to redeems us from that. He is the propitiation, the all appeasing and all pleasing sacrifice to God. He rescues from the depths. If we think we can somehow float around, pretty much skim the top without Him, we are wrong. It doesn't work that way. The corrupt nature pulls us right down. In Christ we are reborn, born of the water and the Spirit, born of the Spirit through the waters of baptism. We are given the new nature that delights in God's light. Our sins are washed away; we are covered by the righteousness of Christ. God pours out the Spirit and through the Spirit faith. Brought out of the depths of sin and death to live for our Lord, to walk in the light.

We have been reborn out of love to love. "See what kind of love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God, AND SO WE ARE." As God has loved us so we owe also to love one another. This is the truth He puts before us. But the pull of the world, the devil, the old nature is great and would try to convince us the way of

darkness is great. Certainly this is not where John is leading us. “You know that He appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin.” (vs 5) “No one who abides in Him keeps on sinning.” (vs 6)

Keeping it up, keeping on sinning is bad. Now we all have sin, we will not be free of it, and to say otherwise is self-deception. We have been cleansed to walk in the light. If there is no change in action, sin must still be the master. John tells us doing sin is doing lawlessness. We are being a law unto ourselves, putting our ways, our desires, over God’s law. It’s rebellion. Jesus appeared to destroy the works of the devil, not to commend those in league with him.

There was most likely some thinking floating around in Ephesus that this flesh was only an imitation of reality, so what you did with it or in didn’t matter much. This would have been the attitude of those who had left the truth. I don’t think we are afflicted with that thinking. But we can be lulled into indifference, or a false sense of invulnerability. Feeding our faith is neglected. Living is this creation battling against the devil, the world, or our flesh takes its toll. The pull of sin is great. It is necessary, desirable to feed your faith. We do so as we gather here. God feeds us. As we feed our faith we stay afloat and we are fruitful. We love one another. We are people of integrity, honesty, humility, servants. We love, that is, we give of ourselves for the good of the other. It is directed first of all to those whom we can see, hear, and touch, those right beside us.

But the appeal is great to indulge the desire or to withhold the help. We can begin to cheapen grace. How can we do that? It’s free, how can we make it any cheaper? We cheapen it by presenting a false understanding of its nature. Instead of the cure that it is, it is used, or the attempt is made to use it as symptom relieve instead of that cure.

Keep that up and it will not be good. John tell us that we purify ourselves as He is pure. We pray, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Our pray is not, “God, indulge, me, a sinner.” The lie is put before us that the darkness is light or at least enlightenment. We pray to be led in the path of righteousness, that path is serving neighbor and glorifying God. John calls us not to be fooled by the path. There are only two to choose from. There is the path of sin or the path of righteousness. The one practicing righteousness is righteous. It’s not a matter of practicing to become righteous, no it’s righteousness that flows from the righteous. Keep up practicing the sin path and you are on the same path as Cain, that of the devil.

These are strong words, but they are like Jesus words spoken to those who did not believe in Him, those not interested in the freedom He came to bring, freedom from the rule of sin (John 8:31-47). The words of our text are Jesus’ words, His words through His apostle. Go down the sin path and go to the bottom. Don’t repent, don’t feed your faith and hell to pay.

Keep it up, righteousness, rely on the One who keeps it all up, the One ruling all things for the sake of the church. Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son (1:3). This is the Son, the Lamb, at the Father’s right hand, the cry before the throne to Him is, “Worthy are you to receive the Book and to open its seals because You were slain and by Your blood You have purchased to God from every tribe and language and people and nation and have made them a kingdom to our God and priests and they shall reign upon the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10) The sealed Book, the Book of unfolding history in His hand. He’s the One who breaks the seals and brings all into the present. He’s in charge keeping it all up for the sake of His bride.

He still have the words of eternal life, just as Peter said so long ago along the Sea of Galilee and just as we sang before the Gospel lesson. It is the same Peter proclaiming the word of life in our lesson from Acts: “Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Christ for you, Jesus.” (Acts 3:19, 20). Repent, turn from, don’t keep on sinning.

Keep on walking in the light. There is work to be done, God’s work. Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. We are way beyond the beginning. The message is the same, repentance and forgiveness, law and Gospel. We have been freed from the depths of death and headed for damnation to forgiveness and life, headed for that which we have not yet achieved. Feeding on God’s spoken and visible we don’t stray, no, we stay in the faith. We don’t try to reshape to fit desire. We walk in the light of God’s Word.

There is work to be done, the work of loving. We love all but we start with those who are brothers and sisters, those who like us, believers, are children of God through faith. It only happens as the fetters of self-centeredness are cut. “Rise, shine, you people,” for God has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

See what manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God. And oh, we are. But look there’s more. Look what’s coming because He’s coming back! It has not appeared what we will be, but when He appears, it does appear. We will be like Him. We will see Him as He is! Wow! For His sake. Amen