

Oregon City United Methodist Church
18955 S. South End Road
Oregon City, OR 97045

Rev. Michael Benischek
503-522-9807
April 3, 2016

Series: Forrest Gump ~ Lessons from I John
Sermon: Life is Like a Box of Chocolates

I John 1:5-10 (NIV)

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out 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, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Sermon:

Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get. Forrest Gump came out in the summer of 1994. I was in college. And I remember thinking that I had my whole life in front of me. And the movie resonated with me, because I didn't know what life was going to bring. It was wide open. I was single, steady job, steady class schedule - graduating within a year. And I could do, or be, anything I wanted to be. Life was like a box of chocolates - choices before me, not knowing what the future held. But you still have to choose. Life is full of choices. As I once heard a teacher say, the highway is filled with flat squirrels, who were incapable of making a decision. Ouch. Life is filled with choices.

This morning, and for the rest of April, we are going to examine selected passages out of I John, a letter in the Old Testament. Now, if you had to guess who wrote I John, you would say that was probably the Disciple _____. Good job! We have three letters from John, on top of his Gospel, and even maybe Revelation. This is part of the section of the New Testament that we call the General Epistles. That's not swearing, epistles. It means "Letter" or "Message" in Greek. Who was this John?

He was a young man, the youngest of all the disciples. In fact, many scholars feel that he was a teenager when he first started to follow the Lord. Perhaps he was seventeen or eighteen years of age. Along with his brother, James, he was a hot-headed young man, given to sharp and impulsive utterances with a tendency toward blowing off steam. He was probably a loudmouth, because Jesus nicknamed him Son of Thunder. That was our Lord's gentle way of labeling John's problem. He just kept the thunder rolling all the time. So our Lord called both James and John Sons of Thunder. You may know some kids as Son's or Daughter's of Thunder.

I ran into a Son of Thunder a couple of weeks ago. We were playing at the park as a family, Steph and I watching our kids run around in sunny Sellwood. And an 8 year old kid was throwing pine cones in my kid's general direction. But the mom came, got the little buggler and went back to their picnic table, 20 yards behind us. A minute later, as I was watching my kiddos, a pine cone whacks me in the back of the head, full force, smack. Now, it didn't really hurt, and I'm not really mad, I'm more dumbfounded, and the words came out of my mouth, "what the what?" I turn around, see the kid - ten yards off, it was a good shot, and I see the mother who is just plain mortified. And I stand there, looking at them, wondering how all of this is going to play out. The mom leans down to her kid and tells him that he needs to go apologize - and he lives up to the name son of thunder. He goes off - tantrum like you wouldn't believe. And he runs off screaming. The mom comes up, and says, I'm sooo sorry. But, I don't know what to do right now. I loved that question. It showed honesty. And I

swear to God she said, "What would you do if you were me? You've got three kids, they seem *somewhat* normal" Apparently, she didn't know what I did for a living - you never give a preacher an opportunity to speak, we don't shut up, so I gave her an out. "Are you really asking?" She said yes. I told her that right now, she is teaching her child that he doesn't have to do anything he doesn't want to do if he just runs away and screams. Seems like a long life to me. You are giving him the choice to apologize or not, and you have to be OK with what he chooses. What you can do, however, is not offer that choice and make him choose something else, "Hey son, we're going to apologize. You do want to walk, or do you want me to carry you?" As a parent you have to choose what's best for the kiddo in the long run. She went to go get her son, who was now miles off, although you could still hear the thunder. They never came back - I thought they'd left. A half-hour later, we walked out, and we walked by them - the mom still trying to get her son to decide to come over and say something. I've got a feeling that it's going to be a long life. Now, I maybe picking on her a little bit, and I know that I'm not the perfect parent. How many restaurants have I had to leave with a little son or daughter of thunder of my own? But I'd rather train them early in life, so it gets a little easier as they get older and can make their own decisions as they grow. Life is full of choices.

But for John, 2000 years ago, something happened along the way. This hotheaded thunderous young man became known as the apostle of love. He was noted for his gentleness and his graciousness and his goodness. Even his Gospel is called the Gospel of Love. For God so loved the world, right? He became a man who was characterized by such an outstanding devotion and love for the Lord Jesus, that all his life he was singled out as the apostle of love.

Now it is this John who writes these letters to us. You may know that this first letter of John is possibly the last of the New Testament to be written. It may well have been written after the Gospel of John. It is perhaps, therefore, the last word we have from the apostles. It undoubtedly comes from near the close of the first century, perhaps even the year 100 A.D., as some scholars tell us. It was written from the city of Ephesus, where John spent the latter years of his life.

It was possibly written to the Christians in this city of Ephesus, who were facing -- as we are -- dangers and difficulties of living in a godless, pagan world, given over to the worship of pleasure and drunkenness, lovers of human wisdom (as all these Greek cities were) and especially desirous of exalting man and his abilities. Now that sounds very much like our modern western world, doesn't it? First John was written to people in this kind of situation then, and therefore it has a lot to say to us.

John is concerned about one thing, primarily, and that is authentic Christianity! I suppose that even as early as the close of the first century, some of the dullness and deadness and drabness with which Christianity has sometimes been plagued, had begun to appear. The freshness, the vitality, the newness, the excitement, the drama of the Christian faith had begun to lose its glow and its glamor.

John, therefore, is led of God to call people back to the vital things, the things that make for real life. So he is concerned about an authentic Christian manifestation, and authentic Christianity is always made up of the same three elements. The body of this letter of First John is an emphasis upon the three essential things that make Christianity genuinely Christian. They are truth, righteousness, and love. Those three, held in perfect balance, are a sign of genuine Christianity. These become, therefore, the marks that John emphasizes as proof to anyone that he or she is a Christian. The letter gives us a wonderful measuring stick whereby we can test our own lives. How are we doing? Do we fulfill the qualifications? Do we manifest truth, righteousness and love? It is a choice we make. A deliberate, intentional choice.

And John asks us this morning: Will we choose light? Or darkness? Seems like a simple question. Choose light or darkness. Well, that's an easy choice. We'd all choose light, of course! But we all know that we all have a little bit of darkness in our lives. How do we live in today's society, in today's culture, and still hold true

to the light? It is a choice. A deliberate, intentional choice.

This morning, we have a wonderful event in our lives of some young ones in our congregation. One ritual of our church is Baptism, whereby one claims the name of Christian, a follower of Christ and are washed clean by the waters of Baptism. In the case of infants, we ask the parents questions of faith and how they plan to raise the child. When that child is old enough to fully understand these questions, somewhere around Junior High, we can ask these questions of faith to them, and they confirm the answers given at their baptism, hence the name, Confirmation.

Today, we have two baptisms, one from a youth old enough to answer, and one almost old enough, but not quite, so her mother will answer for her. We also have 4 other youth who were baptized years ago, but are now old enough to be responsible for their own faith decisions. They are choosing to stand in the light.

How about you? Do you want to walk in the light? Do you hold fast to the truth, do you live a life of righteousness? Do you exude the emotion of love? We live in a world where the life of faith is at worst, ridiculed, or in the best case, antiquated. But I don't believe that truth, righteousness and love are old fashioned - but made relevant with each new generation. Life is filled with choices. And while we never know what we're going to get, we can walk with one who can light the way. And the family of God said, AMEN.