

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
June 26, 2016  
Power-Packed Postcards**

**2 John**

**2<sup>nd</sup> John**

**Hymns: 453 – 465 – 771 – 323**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

In case that you weren't here last Sunday, we are going on vacation this summer, travelling to some unfamiliar locations in our Bible as we visit the four shortest books of the New Testament. And as we found last week in Philemon, these "Power-Packed Postcards" are worthy destinations for us. Today, we continue our travel as we find the shortest book in the Bible - 2 John.

If you have ever vacationed with young kids, more specifically, if you've ever road-tripped with kids, then you know that part of the planning is making sure you have playgrounds at which to stop so that pent up energy can get burnt off. When we were little kids, my brother and I enjoyed parks that had teeter-totters. Being similar in size for most of our childhood - until he finally shot past me - teeter-totters resulted in great fun because there was a balance on each end.

Yet, as some of us certainly know from experience, teeter-totters aren't always a pleasant experience. A bigger child on one end of the wooden plank can cause problems for the smaller - keeping the other child helplessly stranded in the air, or crashing him to the ground with a painful thud. Severely out of balance, the teeter-totter not only ceases to be fun - it actually becomes dangerous.

As we look at the church, two of our most precious treasures are truth and love. And as such, these companions are meant to be present in our lives with balance. But occasionally, our attitudes and actions can cause either truth or love to be kept teetering in the air or sent crashing to the ground.

What we will find today in 2 John is a postcard written to serve as a fulcrum to ensure that truth and love remain in a happy balance in the Church.

This postcard was one of four New Testament books written by the Apostle John. He was one of Jesus' very first disciples. In addition, he was, along

with Peter and James, part of Jesus' inner circle of disciples who witnessed some of the special events of Jesus' life like the Transfiguration. He grew up in Galilee as a fisherman, learning the trade from his father, Zebedee. Most likely, he was first a disciple of John the Baptist. And as a young man, he and his brother James had a memorable nickname, as Jesus himself called them the Sons of Thunder. He was likely the only disciple who was there at the cross to see Jesus suffer and die. John had a special relationship with Jesus; and John was a special apostle as he was one of the most dependable, loved, and trusted leaders of the early Christian church. Though early in his life, he may have been known for his pride and fiery personality, as an apostle he was known for his love and gentleness, exhibited in his leadership and his writing.

As we turn to his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter today (again, finding our destination is the first key - all the way to the back, just a few pages before Revelation), we find a somewhat peculiar address. The writer introduces himself simply with these words: "**The Elder.**"

So how do we know it was John? First, we can compare the writing style to his Gospel and first letter and find a clear match. Second, we can rely on the testimony of early church fathers who attributed this letter to John. Finally, we can also think about John's propensity for metaphor as to why he would refer to himself with a nickname. Remember John was the one who never referred to himself by name in his Gospel, instead calling himself "The disciple whom Jesus loved."

But why "the Elder?" At the time of writing, John was the "old man" of the Christian church. In fact, he was very likely the only of the original apostles who was still alive - the rest having been martyred for sharing their Savior. And so with equal parts humility and authority, John called himself "The Elder" knowing that those to whom he was writing would know exactly who he was. While that might seem mysterious to us, it was not to those who received this letter.

Perhaps more intriguing for us is the recipient whom John calls "**the chosen lady and her children.**" There are really two options for who this could be. It could've been an actual lady in the church and her children. Basic rule - start with the simplest explanation. Would've been a woman who was a strong layleader, think Lydia, who offered help and lodging for the church in Philippi.

More likely though, just as he did with "Elder", John was using a metaphor. In that sense, lady would be a congregation - probably one of the churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) which John served. The Bible often refers to the Church in feminine terms. Her children then would be the members of that church.

The reason that John wrote this short postcard to this dear lady and her children jumps off the page as we read the first 3 verses. (**Read vv. 1-3 emphasis added to Truth.**) Do you have any idea what John might have been concerned about?

John wrote because he cared about truth. As we look at all of John's writings in the New Testament, it is clear that truth is one of John's favorite topics. In his Gospel, he talks about truth 27 times; in his first letter, 10 times; in this short letter, 5 times; and in his 3<sup>rd</sup> letter, 6 times.

And truth was important to John because it was the lifeblood of the church. John had listened as Jesus told him and the other disciples, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." John had heard Jesus ask his Father to "Sanctify his disciples by the Truth" through the work of the Spirit working through the Word. John remembered Jesus saying to the Jews that "If they really wanted to be his disciples, they needed to hold true to his teachings."

So what was happening to the truth in these churches to which John was writing? Let's check out the postcard.

**Read Verse 4.** John begins with an expression of joy. But isn't it interesting what he said gave him this joy? He was happy because some were walking in the truth. Some? Only some were walking in the truth? Wouldn't that be cause for alarm rather than rejoicing? But John rejoiced because he understood an important reality as he looked at the church. John remembered that each person in the church comes from a world where truth is foreign; truth is relative; truth is changing. For the Christian, there is a path to truth – a spiritual journey that takes us from spiritual ignorance fueled by the "wisdom" of the world to spiritual maturity instilled by the Spirit through the Word. And John was celebrating that "some" in this church were there – this was a reason to rejoice.

However, we can infer by looking at the rest of the postcard that some were struggling with the Truth. And it's important to realize that the reason for their struggle was actually coming from a good place. They were trying to follow a command from Jesus on which the church had been founded: "Love one another." But the issue as they put that love into practice is that they lost balance. Love was sending Truth crashing to the ground.

So John gave them a reminder about Truth and Love. **Read verses 5-7.** John begins those words by making it clear that he was not giving a new command. Jesus had told his church to love, John was telling them to love. But they needed to remember an important truth: Love means walking in obedience to Jesus' commands. Love means staying true to what Jesus spoke. For disciples of Jesus, there must be a balance between truth and love!

That was the simple principal lesson, now it was time for the practical lesson: Why was this such a big deal?

Before we get there, it is important to understand how the early church was structured. Most congregations didn't have the luxury that we enjoy of having a trained, called, full-time pastor. There also weren't any completed versions of the Bible for these churches to use to teach and guide them.

As such, there were travelling Bible teachers; they would come to a place, stay for a while, teach, and then move on. You can imagine how these believers spread across the Roman world would look forward to having someone come along who could teach them and help them grow spiritually. They would welcome these men into their homes and provide for their needs to show their appreciation and love. This was all very good.

But here was the problem: **Read verses 7-8.**

In an effort to show love, this church was running into an issue as they were actually welcoming and supporting false teachers. And so what was really happening was that love was leading to loss. They were losing the truth and what it supported – their faith and ultimately their life.

And they were being tricked because what these teachers were bringing sounded so good. These travelling teachers came to these churches with a claim that there was an additional secret knowledge that the original apostles had not yet given to them. These teachers claimed to be progressing the truth; taking them farther in their faith.

But John had a dose of reality as he wrote in verse 8: **Read verse 8.** By trying to run ahead and progress, they didn't realize that they were actually leaving God and his truth behind! And their love – shown by welcoming these teachers – was actually the reason they were losing the truth. They needed balance.

So John had to tell this church that a balance of truth and love would mean that sometimes rather than welcoming a travelling teacher with hospitality and kindness, they would need to do this: **Read verse 10-11.** There would be times when the church would need to shut their doors and push people who claimed to be their brothers in Christ away. And it wasn't an act of hate. Turning a person away and keeping them out of their fellowship was actually an act of love. It would show love for God and the Truth of his Word. It would show love for the souls of the members of that church who were being protected. And it was actually also showing love for the souls of the false teachers who were being told that they needed to look at their doctrine which had led them astray.

And if the church was not willing to do this, John's message was clear: The church was actually sharing in their wicked work of leading souls away from the

Truth of God by supporting these men and their ministries. In their effort to show love, they were sending the Truth crashing to the ground. That is a scary thought!

As we look at this short section of Scripture, we can again see a modern postmark stamped onto John's postcard. These words are for us just as much as they were for the "Dear Lady" and her children.

We live in a world where progressing the "Truth" and growing in love are encouraged.

The world tells us that we should be excited that in this Post Modern world, we have figured out that truth is relative; that it is changing; that it is personal. What might have been true 50, 100, 1000 years ago isn't necessarily true today. What might be true for you isn't necessarily true for me. More important than agreeing on Truth is discovering "Truth" for yourself. "What is true for you?" that is the key.

I'm also told every day through the media how proud we should be that America is leading the way in breaking down barriers and showing the world what "love" is as we fight for the right for each person to proudly be who they are. "Love" means embracing and encouraging people even if their lifestyles are in direct contrast to God's plan. We should be proud that we live in a city which has progressed so much that we just became the first city to have a national monument for LGBT rights.

And perhaps it seems right, what the world is telling us. It is easier; it is better just to love; to embrace people for who and what they are; to not just allow, but to encourage them to live according to their natural desires, no matter where that leads them in life. Acceptance is the key to happiness.

That is after all, what many in the church are now telling us. Go out and you will find churches that are progressing in the Truth as they realize that God's Word was not meant to be a never-changing rule by which all else is ruled, but instead an ever-changing guide based on our thoughts and opinions. You will find churches that proudly boast that they accept everyone in love, that they will never judge, that they will never tell a person to change who and what God has made them. You will find churches who compromise the Bible in an effort to work together and make the Bible more attractive to the unbelieving world.

But what happens? In an effort to live in this "love" and share this "love", so many are leaving the Truth that God has established behind. They end up with "truth" that is so watered down, that it can no longer be found. And they become lost and misguided as the Truth is destroyed as it crashes to the ground.

But there is also danger on the other side. For some, it's easy in this time in which we live to want to bunker down with the Truth and close off to the rest of

the world; to look out our windows at the world and say, "I have the Truth, all of you are going to hell and the best thing I can do is protect what I have and stay away from all of that."

And this attitude can also be found in the church, as people give up on reaching out and focus on protecting themselves from the world. It's seen in Christians that spit poisonous fire at anyone and everyone who isn't part of our fellowship or living in accordance with the Bible.

And in an effort to protect the truth, we leave love behind. We become protectors of the truth from the world instead of proclaimers of truth to the world. Love is what motivates us to continue to go out into a world that desperately needs the Truth of God's Word. And without love, we hold Truth up in the air towering above the lives that need it.

Balancing truth and love is not easy, but it is absolutely vital. And there is no one who shows us that better than Jesus. He's the master of balancing truth and love. He was not afraid to call sin "sin" and expose deceived hearts and hypocritical lives. He boldly proclaimed that we are all sinners on the road to an eternity in hell. He never hid the truth.

But he never lacked love. In love, he came to the sinners of this world, rather than sitting up in heaven in judgment. In love, he went to the houses of sinners, rather than staying away in fear and piety. In love, he told us who those sinners were, that he loved us by giving his life on the cross, taking the place that we deserved and paying our debt of sin. The cross is the greatest display of truth and love in balance.

Through his life and teaching, Jesus helps us understand that love and truth are teammates, not opponents. If you love someone, you'll tell them the truth. For the truth always has at its core God's love for all people in Christ.

Balancing truth and love is a fine art that, finally, only God's Holy Spirit can teach us. The more time we spend with Jesus and his Spirit, in his Word, in worship, in the sacrament, the more God's Spirit will give us the wisdom we need to find this important balance in our lives.

And as we bring the Truth in Love to the people of this world, we will find joy as God's work is carried out in the balance he shows us in Jesus. Amen.