

“TUCKED AWAY IN THE BIBLE: V - I JOHN”

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I John 1:1-2:2

Well, here it is! Here is that little book tucked away in the pages of the New Testament that tricks them every time in Bible drill! I John. Remember I told you when I started this sermon series a few weeks ago, that I can always trick the confirmands when I call out I John in a Bible drill, because invariably they come to me with the first chapter of the Gospel of John, not I John.

So just so you're not tricked, let me tell you about I John, and its companions, II John and III John. I, II and III John are near the very end of the New Testament, just before the last two books of the Bible, Jude and Revelation. Scholars disagree on the author of these three letters. Some say it was John, the son of Zebedee, most say it was probably someone in the inner circle around John, the writer of the Gospel of John.

At any rate, no matter who the author, the three letters of John are written to young churches who are struggling. The reason these particular churches are struggling is because of something that has a big name - the Docetic controversy - which basically means that there was a theory going around at the time - docetism - which denied the reality of Jesus' earthly life. For those who followed that philosophy, it was all about the divine Jesus, not his humanity.

So these letters were written to counteract those teachings - to talk about Jesus being both fully human and fully divine - to emphasize that Jesus became one of us, and died a fully human death - yet he was at one and the same time fully divine, the only begotten Son of God.

Once the writer warns against that false teaching, and establishes that clear theology in his letters, he moves on. And he moves on to talk about love, sacrificial love, in particular, God's sacrificial love for us poured out in Jesus Christ. You heard the beautiful language he used - "If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (I John 2:1-2, NRSV)

What a wonderful passage to read, especially on this Sunday, World Communion Sunday - that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for us, yes, but not just for

us, for the whole world! If we ever forget that, this day surely helps us remember. For on this day, World Communion Sunday, Christians throughout the entire world commune together. It is the one Sunday on which you can almost guarantee that all Christians are coming to the table of the Lord for Holy Communion.

I love World Communion Sunday. I've loved it since I was a child when it was called back then, Worldwide Communion Sunday. It seemed like such an awesome thing to me then. Imagine, all Christians in the entire world taking communion at the same time I was. I could picture in my mind's eye children in Africa taking communion with me, and children in England, and children in Australia and Asia. While I came to communion in my nice little dress and probably patent leather shoes, I could see others coming in their native costumes - Native Americans with their headresses, Japanese in their kimonos, Siberians in warm and furry parkas. It was an awesome thing for a child to feel so connected to people around the world.

And it is still an awesome thing, when we stop to think about it, which this text and this day calls us to do. Perhaps it is even more awesome than ever before to do it, because our world is so divided these days. Far too often we see the ways we are different, instead of what or who we have in common.

Far too often, we categorize each other. Old/young, rich/poor, black/white/brown, straight/gay, Democrat/Republican, liberal/conservative, American/foreigner. You get the idea. And we let those things keep us apart - even in the church.

I read recently about a head usher that went to talk to the pastor with a concern he had. "It seems that despite all his urgings, he simply could not get people to stand close enough together at the communion rail. In a frustrated tone, he told the pastor how each time he sent the proper number of people up, but they never seemed to fit just right. 'Some people,' he complained, 'leave 6 to 8 inches between them and the person next to them, which crowds up the ones on the very end!' In desperation, he threw up his hands and said, 'Can't people get close together even at communion?'" (On-line, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com))

Oh my, I think that's what this day in particular calls us to do. Get close together, and realize, indeed, that we are close together - not just all of us here in this place - but all of us gathered around the Lord's table throughout the world on this day. We are close together - we are one in Christ Jesus! We are more than the things that identify us, the things that we use to divide ourselves up - we are one in Christ Jesus - the body of Christ throughout the world. Today especially we are one, for we gather at His table together. Together.

So I invite you to close your eyes for a moment, and begin to picture this wonderful banquet table that encompasses the world. See the little child with big beautiful eyes and bare feet walk forward with the dust of the Congo on his feet - "the body of Christ broken for you."

And see the old Russian couple going up the aisle in a cathedral with incense whirling up to heaven around them - "the body of Christ broken for you."

See the room filled with thousands of Koreans who have gathered, as they do every morning at 5 a.m. for prayer, and then one by one they come forward - "the body of Christ broken for you."

Picture our friends in Thousand Sticks and Lower Beech Fork, Kentucky receiving bread and juice from Steve Springer - "the body of Christ broken for you."

See a hospital patient in bed reaching out and taking the elements from a chaplain - "the body of Christ broken for you."

And see a soldier in the middle of Iraq or Afghanistan, hearing bullets in the background - "the body of Christ broken for you."

Friends, we are all one in Christ Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, who died for the sins of the whole world - the whole world. May we always remember that, especially when we are inclined to focus more on the things that make us different than what we have in common. We are one in Christ Jesus, and on this day, we celebrate our oneness with all Christians in the world at the table of our Lord. What an awesome day it is!

May our prayer be that one day, *everyday* will be world communion day; one day, the barriers will come down, our differences won't divide us, and all will be well. One day, in God's time. May it be so.

Amen.