

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Easter 3

April 18, 2021

Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

Get a grip on reality!

—1 John 1:1-2:2

Get a grip on reality! Has anyone ever said something like that to you? Can you imagine someone saying that to a Christian because of our faith? Get a grip on reality! You Christians have your head in the clouds. You live in a fantasy world. You're always talking about pie-in-the-sky things like heaven and eternal life. Come back to the "real world." Get a grip on reality!

During this Easter season we're going through the book of 1 John in our weekly lessons and in our sermon series. Jesus has been raised from the dead. He came back to life on the third day to leave death in the dust, and he has raised us from the death and darkness of sin to live a new life with him. Today, as living children of God, with Jesus as our brother, we celebrate forgiveness of sins and new life; we have been raised to life with Jesus. Now, as we study God's Word today, I am going to say to you: Get a grip on reality!

Many people have this view of "faith," as if it's divorced from reality. There's the "real" part of our lives—the part we can touch and feel and see, our day-to-day reality in a real, tangible world. And there's the "faith" part of our lives—the part that we "believe," the part that exists in the spirit world that we can't touch or see. That part is perceived as imaginary or illusory, mythical or hypothetical—but something less than "real." Do you ever compartmentalize your life this way? Your "faith" life and your "real" life, as if they're disconnected? If you do, then get a grip on reality! The things that you and I hold onto as the truth of our Christian faith are not imaginary or theoretical. They are not things that someone dreamed up once upon a time under the influence of a controlled substance in order to invent a new religion. They are real things that happened to real people that changed the course of history. We believe in historical facts that did not take place in Mr. Rogers' land of make-believe but in the real world of space and time and history. Your faith, what you believe, holds onto things that are real.

Jesus' disciples got a grip on reality. The Apostle John, the author of this epistle, got a grip on reality. They literally got a grip on reality when they touched, handled, felt the real, living, breathing, risen Lord Jesus Christ! At first, they couldn't believe it. They had seen Jesus' crucified corpse taken down from the cross. They knew he was dead, his lifeless body laid in a tomb cut in the rock nearby. They were despondent, overwhelmed with grief. But the women who went to the tomb on the third day came back with news that was incomprehensible. They said they had seen Jesus alive again—really alive! They had seen him with their own eyes, touched and held him. And now this Jesus appeared in their midst inside a locked room and said, "Peace be with you!" He ate food in their presence. He dispelled their doubts and calmed their fears. They touched. They felt. They heard. They saw. They literally got a grip on the reality of the risen Christ! No wonder the early Church started the tradition of greeting one another with the Easter greeting: "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" Our whole Christian faith rests on the reality of the resurrection, that the crucified rabbi from Nazareth was raised to life again to prove that he is the Son of God in the flesh and the Savior of the world.

John wants you to get a grip on reality, just as he got a grip on reality. *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.* Jesus is not a myth. He is not a legend. He isn't the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy. He is the very Son of God in the flesh, God who came to live with us. He is a very real human being who performed extraordinary miracles, did things that no mere mortal could do, and finally rose from the dead. Get a grip on reality the way Saint John the Apostle got a grip on reality—not literally with your hands but with a living faith. Cling in faith to Jesus the risen Christ and trust in him as the only Son of the Father. Cling to that reality!

That brings us to the second reality that John wants us to grasp. We know who Jesus is; let's grasp the reality of who we are. We are sinners who have sinned against God. Sin is not a concept. It is not breaking societal norms or social constructs, doing things that are taboo because a restrictive, puritanical, close-minded culture says they're taboo. Sin is a violation of God's moral law. It is an offense against a God who is infinitely holy. *This is the*

*message we have heard from him [Jesus] and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. Get a grip on reality! You have sinned against God. You have done what is evil and failed to do what is good. And so have I. We have fallen short of God's perfection. We have earned the wages of sin, which is death now and forever. Where there is sin there is no fellowship with God. Get a grip on reality! We human beings are not naturally good, naturally noble, naturally altruistic, naturally friendly toward God and our neighbor. The Prophet Jeremiah had a grip on reality when he said, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). King David confessed his own condition when he said, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). Each of us has incurred the righteous wrath of God by our sinful nature and by our disobedience. *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**

And that brings us to the third reality that John wants us to grasp. Get a grip on reality! The reason the Son of God came was to destroy the power of sin, crush the power of Satan, vanquish the power of death, and save sinners from our sins. That's why there was a cross outside Jerusalem on Good Friday where the Son of God bled and died—so that his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death could wash all our sins away. That's why there was an empty tomb on Easter Sunday—so that every witness of the living Christ, everyone who trusts in him, could have the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit called you out of death and darkness, opened your eyes to see the light, so that you could walk in the light of life as a servant and follower of Jesus. *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 confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all righteousness.*

This life is a difficult struggle. John says, "*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.*" Falling into sin, dishonoring God, bringing sin's consequences on ourselves, is a constant threat. We fight against temptations from the world around us. We fight the desires of our own flesh. But the Savior who gave his life for us and rose again has brought us into fellowship with him and his Father is not only protecting us from the Evil One; he's interceding for us at the throne of the Father. Get a grip on reality! Your very real Jesus, who loves you and gave himself for you, is really ascended into heaven and seated at the right hand of God the Father, where he pleads your case. *If anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* How beautiful! How comforting! When you and I stumble and fall into sin, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. St. Paul says in Romans, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how much more will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies; where is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died, more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8).

Get a grip on reality! It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter where you've been. You trust in Jesus; you are not covered in shame. You are not burdened with guilt. You are not alienated from God because of your sins. In your real Lord Jesus, your Savior and your friend, you are washed and cleansed, covered in his holy blood and clothed in his holy righteousness. Lift your head high as a chosen member of God's family! You are God's own child through Jesus, who became the atoning sacrifice for all your sins. Get a grip on reality! Your Christian faith has a grip on reality. We grasp things the way they really are. Our faith grasps onto Jesus, the real Son of God, our brother in the flesh.

Get a grip on reality! In Jesus, your sins are forgiven. That's reality. Amen.