

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 11 April 2021

*Dear God, as we hear your word, may we be transformed into a true community of believers, ready to go into the world to testify that Christ is alive and active in our lives today. Amen.*

1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

### *Testimonies of Easter*

In my leisure time, I enjoy reading novels – especially detective novels. One of them that I think ingeniously written is titled *The Murders in the Rou Morgue*, written by Edgar Allan Poe – an American writer, poet and literary critic. In this short story, the most intriguing part is totally different statements/testimonies among witnesses of the crime. The protagonist in this story is C. Auguste Dupin, who is a man in Paris and he solves the mystery of the brutal murder of the women. Numerous witnesses hear a suspect, a male voice – sharp, strong, and foreign accent. But no one agrees on what language is spoken. The languages that the witnesses testify individually are the least known ones to them. At the murder scene, Dupin finds a hair that does not appear to be human. In the end, the murderer turns out to be an orangutan that escaped from his master. The story lets us think about what testimonies are really.

As seen, testimonies are based on people's experiences and understanding of an event. In doing so, the witnesses are able to share their experiences with other people. There are also false testimonies to deceive people. Testimonies of Easter are also based on people's experience in faith. On a personal level, it begins with witnessing the light of God, and then it becomes a communal one through the fellowship of a faith community. Finally, the communal testimonies become a confession of faith for the world as the testimony of Easter itself is the life of the church.

### ***Witnessing the light***

Witnessing the light of God is based on personal experiences. Imagine that someone asks us about what Easter means to us. The answers may vary as individuals' personal faith journey with God varies. In 1John 1:1, it reads, "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life..." All these action verbs – to hear, to see, to look at and to touch indicate that witnessing the light of God involves our sensory and spiritual experiences. In John 20:25b, Thomas says, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my

finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Thomas may not be the only one who would wish to see and touch the risen Jesus. We may also doubt about the presence of God if life seems too harsh to us. To be witnesses of the light, the light comes to us first.

Light and darkness are used in both Old and New Testaments as metaphors not only for good and evil, or order and chaos, but also for truth and untruth, or life and death.<sup>1</sup> Psalm 104:2 reads that God covers Godself with light as a garment. Others testify that Jesus is light.<sup>2</sup> In John 8:12, Jesus says of himself, “I am the light of the world.” He also tells his disciples, “You are the light of the world.” In doing so, he tells them to let their light shine that people may see their good works, and people might glorify their Father in heaven.<sup>3</sup> The disciples are also called the light of the world as they are with Jesus who is the light. That is, the light chooses its witnesses so that they will continue to testify about the work of the light. Yet despite their first-hand experiences with Jesus, the disciples still needed Easter to be faithful witnesses to light.

In 1 John 1:1-2, the word ‘to testify’ - μαρτυρέω (*martyreō*) in Greek means ‘bear witness, attest, or suffer martyrdom.’ We can see that the word ‘martyrs/martyrdom’ is from this word - μαρτυρέω (*martyreō*). Together with *martyreō*, active verbs such as ‘to see (ὁράω – *horaō*)’ and ‘to hear (ἀκούω-*akouo*)’ are used in the perfect tense. It means a past reality extending into the reader’s present. In terms of time, what happened in Easter – the work of the light - has been effective and valid until today. Each individual’s testimonies become a communal one.

### ***Fellowship in Christ***

The fellowship in Christ is another form of testimonies of Easter. Naturally, those who walk in the light will enjoy fellowship with each other. In this fellowship, we care for each other. We learn from each other. Our faith let us get together to be a community of faith. In 1 John 1:3, John emphasizes the importance of genuine fellowship (*koinonia*) with ‘us,’ that is, the apostles and “with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.” Through the fellowship in Christ, God’s love is expressed visibly to the world. In practice, however, it is not at all simple. Soon we learn that the writer of 1 John is distraught over a schism in that church.<sup>4</sup> As such, the emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 5:20; John 3:19-21; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 4:17-18

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:16; Luke 2:32; John 1:1-4

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:14-16

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 2:18-25; 4:1-6; 5:1-12

fellowship is important in 1 John. The word ‘fellowship’ - κοινωνία in Greek has a number of meanings: fellowship, participation, sharing, or contribution. All of these meanings convey the image of open arms of welcome of community. In this community, we are mutually reinforced. It helps us grow in faith because we share the testimonies of Easter. When we walk in the light through the fellowship with each other, our faith grows stronger.

### ***Confession of faith***

The other form of testimonies of Easter is the confession of faith. “If we confess (*homologeō*) our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”<sup>5</sup> The word *homologeō* (ὁμολογέω - confess) is a combination of *homou* (together with) and *legō* (to say). It can mean either a confession of faith or a confession of sin. In this verse, it is the latter – a confession of sin. Fellowship in the faith community allows us to do both. If we live alone in a remote place with no contact with other people, we don’t even know we have sinned or have a right relationship with God. Fellowship in a faith community works like a mirror through which we can see our true reflections.

In our storytime, we ‘heard’ and ‘saw’ a donkey who had a few distinctive characteristics. Accidentally, we became witnesses to the event. Initially, we didn’t remember much about the donkey. For the reasons, first, we didn’t know that we had to pay close attention to the donkey. Second, we didn’t know that we were supposed to tell other people the donkey. Third, we didn’t have any relationship with the donkey either, so there was not much to remember about him. Similar to the witnesses of the story – *The Murders of Rue Morgue*, our testimonies about the donkey were incomplete and random.

Testimonies of Easter is based on believers’ sharing Jesus’ life personally and collectively as a community. Witnessing the light of God is not about an abstract truth, but it initiates fellowship and godly living. The goal of the faith in God is not only heaven when we die, but Christlikeness here and now. As such, when we are rightly related to God, we are also rightly related to our fellow believers. It leads us to the confession of faith, which is our testimonies of Easter as the church. Indeed these three – witnessing the light, fellowship, and the confession of faith - enable us to be faithful witnesses to Easter continually, and we know that our testimonies are trustworthy. May God bless us to be so today, tomorrow and always. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 John 1:9