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April 8, 2018 – 2nd Sunday in Easter

Text: 1 John 1:1-2:2 (NIV)

The Incarnation of the Word of Life

1 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. ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ We write this to make our^[a] joy complete.

Light and Darkness, Sin and Forgiveness

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ 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^[b] sin.

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

2 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Footnotes:

- a. 1 John 1:4 Some manuscripts *your*
- b. 1 John 1:7 Or *every*

We haven't been down to the Ark Encounter yet, though I'm very curious to see it. We enjoy going to the Creation Museum every now and then. It's not quite so exciting in winter, since the outdoor garden is all brown and drab. In spring and summer all of the flowers are in bloom. The trees are green. The bees and butterflies are busy with their work. The garden doesn't so much teach us about creation as it is a celebration of what God has created.

The inside is where there is a lot to read and learn. They discuss the seven days of creation and try to imagine what the world was like on each day. Light appearing, land, water, plants, animals, and finally people. The museum takes a look at those early years, the generations after Adam and people grew and spread across the world. What would the world look like in those days?

They spend a fair bit of time talking about Noah and the ark. How would the ark have

worked? How would all of those animals fit on there and how did Noah and his family care for them? What happened to the rest of the world in the flood and what did the flood really mean? They look at dinosaurs and land formations and all kinds of things that were affected by the flood.

Though the museum is really focused on the beginning of history and those first generations up to the time of Noah, thankfully they don't stop there. They also address the reality of sin and what the sin of Adam and Eve brought into God's good creation. Hatred, war, disease, death, and everything else that came about, all a corruption of creation, creation breaking down. But then they continue further, the coming of Christ who comes to save his people and restore his good creation. Jesus comes into creation to bring goodness back to what God had originally made good. They round out the story by looking ahead to the return of Christ and life in a perfected world free from sin. The story of salvation doesn't end until Christ comes back to bring sin and death to their final end.

All in all, an interesting place to spend a day or two. They have fossils, some gems and minerals, a big insect collection, and a lot of historical information on the people and places from the Bible. They also talk a lot about science. The natural sciences, biology, chemistry, and such have a lot to say about how the world works and many scientists today dispute the Bible's account of how the world came to be the way it is today.

If you saw the debate between Ken Ham, the founder of the Creation Museum, and Bill Nye the Science Guy, you saw this in action. Both people looked at the same information and drew very different conclusions, all because of what they brought to their investigation. One believes the world was made by a Creator, and one believes it wasn't. Ken Ham argued the account of creation and the flood in the Bible is perfectly plausible and the history it describes fits very well with what we see today. Bill Nye argued none of what the Bible described is really possible and the only way the world and mankind could have come about is through a whole lot of time and a lot of luck.

It's unlikely Bill Nye changed his mind. Though there's a follow up debate between the two when he comes to get a tour of the newly opened Ark Encounter. I haven't had a chance to watch it yet, but I'm interested to see what he has to say about it. In any case, it's still unlikely he will change his mind, because what he wants is not something the Bible is going to provide him.

He doesn't want there to be a God. He wants to be able to figure out everything there is to know in the universe all by himself. Last week I talked about how Adam and Eve's sin was about looking for life in creation, rather than in the Creator. It's also a desire to break free of their limitations. They wanted to know more, to be more, than what God had given them. That sin still lurks in all of us. For Bill Nye and many scientists, it's a desire to have their scientific analytical mind pick apart all of the mysteries of the universe and finally understand them. They want to figure out how it all works, from the smallest atom to the largest star, their mind alone can make sense of everything. That makes God unnecessary, a hindrance even. If there's a God then he can do things that won't make sense to us. He can create things that will never be figured out. He doesn't have to follow the same rules the rest of us do. The scientists who want to know everything can't abide that. It means they have limits, limits that can't be overcome.

Being scientists though, they think to themselves, "If I had something that could prove God did it, that would be different. I need something I can see for myself. I need something I can hold in my hands. It needs to be irrefutable. If I can't see it or hold it myself, then I won't believe it." It sounds very scientific and all. A scientist shouldn't just believe any old thing they're told. No one should. A scientist experiments and proves or disproves their ideas. The thought, the expectation is that, with enough time, they'll eventually get it all figured out.

Scientists aren't alone there. Many atheists have that thought. "If God could just prove himself to me. Show me something, do something that could only come from him, I'd believe him." It becomes a pretty convenient excuse, because the only proof they allow God to offer is the proof they want. Each person comes up with their own list of what's allowed and what isn't and if God's proof isn't on that list, then God isn't there at all. It makes it easy for them, because that means they can go on living however they want because there is no higher power to set the rules.

As Christians, we know it doesn't work that way. As we heard in the readings a few weeks back, "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." God does not need to follow our

rules. He created the world. He lives above it, outside it. He doesn't obey our wishes and we can't expect him to do things the way we think they should be done, nor can we make him do anything at all.

You hear the message of the Gospel and you trust that it's true and that's all you need. You pray for forgiveness. You hear him declare you are forgiven and you go on. There isn't a lot more to it. You've got God's Word. There isn't anything else you need. Those other folks, like Bill Nye, don't believe, but that's because they don't have faith. You don't need proof like he does. You just know God's there and you take strength and comfort in that.

It's a very noble and pious idea. You don't need those things to trust in God. Jesus even says, "blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." But that idea quickly turns into the prideful thought that, because I don't need that kind of proof now, I never will. It also overlooks the fact that God never gives us anything as proof. All of this is a result of sin, falling into some of the same traps as Bill Nye and those like him do.

How many times have you been at the end of your rope in your life, wondering if it's all going to fall apart? You might offer up a prayer to God, "Lord, I could use a little help here. I just can't seem to make ends meet on my own." You might not remember the prayer later, but somehow life moves on and you put the situation behind you. It may not be gone, but it isn't affecting you like it once did. You've moved back to an even keel and are handling yourself ok again. It's a wonder your life continues on after the things you dealt with, but it has and here you are. Where was God in all of that? Right where he said he'd be, right beside you, supporting you the whole time. You end up looking for proof when it was there all along. God says he loves you and will care for you, and so he does. You're still here because God's grace and mercy has defended you against the evils of the world. His grace has protected you from yourself when your sinful ways had put you on a course to self-destruction.

But it isn't just those intangibles God provides. The Apostle John says, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us." The Bible we have wasn't written by people who make stuff up. They aren't drug addled hallucinations. They aren't given by people who

are trying to coerce you or get you to buy into something, like the Mormons do, “The voice of God spoke to me and gave me a new revelation.” No, none of that. The Gospels were written on the testimony of those who followed Christ and saw him throughout his ministry. They watched him at the beginning and followed him to the cross where he paid for the sins of the world. They followed him again after he rose from the dead and brought an end to death. They followed him to the mountaintop as he ascended into heaven and they followed him afterward, right up to their own deaths and beyond.

Unlike scientists who think they can prove things they’ve never seen, like how the world was made and how people came to live on it, these apostles tell you what they’ve seen firsthand. They share it with you so you will know it for yourself.

The same is true of our forgiveness. There are times when hearing the words just isn’t enough for our frail hearts. We need something more tangible. God doesn’t neglect us there either. His word of forgiveness comes to us in the waters of baptism. His grace joins the physical substance and washes over us so we can feel and touch it, to know it for ourselves. Jesus, the conqueror of death and our savior from sin, comes to us physically as well. You touch, taste, and smell his body and blood to know he is here and his grace and mercy are yours. There can be no doubt. Every week you return to the table where he reminds you again of his forgiveness, he reminds you you are part of his family and blessed by his Father. The whole liturgy that encompasses the word and sacraments here on Sunday morning is meant to be one long sharing of God’s word. The word of God proclaimed with every voice and heard by every ear. The images here telling you the story of God’s salvation again, shared by the Spirit through the writings of the prophets and apostles.

Thomas wanted proof Christ was alive again. Jesus admonishes him for his weak faith, and yet proves himself to Thomas anyway. He knows our faith isn’t always as strong as it should be, or needs to be. So he gives us all of these things to help us remember and to tell us again what he has done for us. We should never doubt God, but when we do, look to what he gives you here and believe.