

We will be like Him  
3 Easter B 2009

“And all who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure” 1 John 3:3

The psalm makes a petition to God saying, “Many are saying, “Oh, that we might see better times! Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O LORD.” The response to that cry is an interesting one. Wanting to see better times is a perennial plea of every generation. The psalmist simply states that the Lord has put gladness in his heart more than the increase of grain, wine and oil – symbols of wealth. He sleeps well because his safety rests with God.

In every generation hope is crucial and it was especially true in the apostolic age. How did God lift up His countenance upon the first Christians?

There is an irony to that question in what we hear in the scriptures today. Normally hope is a desire for the future. When we celebrate a person’s life at death and the hope of life eternal, resurrection seems far away. Peter speaking in our first lesson says that “the God of our ancestors has glorified Jesus.” Peter attributes the healing of the man lame from birth to this glorified Jesus. There is no personal piety or power from a disciple involved. Jesus alone has made the man whole. The risen Christ has done this wonderful act of love. And this miracle was done in a time when medical treatment was not available. Again, the empty tomb breaks into the consciousness of those who know Jesus.

God has lifted up the light of His countenance upon His people. A new reality from the future broke into the present. What is this new reality? How will this new nature of our Savior Jesus make any difference in our lives today? Hopefully the remaining scriptures will give us a glimpse of this new nature we will have and the better times ahead.

The letter of John makes a case for who the “Christian” is in Christ. First he says we are called God’s children because that is what we are. Yet the nature of being a child of God needs to be clarified.

Then the letter further states that what we know is, that we will be like Him and we will see Him as He is. There is an assumption on the part of John that his readers will know what he means. He goes on to write about this hope of seeing Jesus and being like Him.

Despite the thought that we don’t know what to expect when we see Jesus, John gives some instruction about getting ready for that day. If we have this hope of seeing Him, then purifying ourselves is similar to getting ready to attend a wedding. We get cleaned up and put on decent clothes. Our thoughts are positive and we wish the couple our best intentions. This is the way we purify ourselves. John is writing the same thing about making ourselves pure, just as the bridegroom is pure.

Like you, I have difficulty getting my mind around the rest of what John writes. Spiritual purity is spelled out as abiding in Christ and living without sin. Yet John previously writes in this letter that if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus the righteous. Besides, John warns his readers in the first chapter of this letter not to be deceived or live in denial that we are sinners. Sin is an inevitable part of humanity, but it is something that we must strive to live without. Sin is rebellion against God and his law. Thanks to John, the promise and excitement of the resurrection is put in terms that we can grasp in everyday living.

John's letter talks of purity. We don't read much about purity and we may only hear about pure living with regard to monks and nuns that live in a community. Yet striving for purity is the way to become more like our Savior. Becoming "pure" is not automatic but an intentional act. Again John warns the children of God not to be deceived. We must choose to do what is right. Purity is *about* doing right.

John's thinking is quite developed on the subject of Christian living. Going from a frightened and terrified disciple to maturity is a process of time and being faithful. Thinking of those days when Jesus' transformed body ate fish and drank wine must have been foremost in John's mind as he wrote his letter. John was more than persuaded of the nature and reality of the risen life. John saw Jesus living that life right before his eyes. In Luke's account, the visit of Jesus has Him opening the understanding of all He had taught the disciples. The prophets, the psalms and the Law of Moses were connected in their minds. The Holy Spirit would continue to be their teacher and guide. God had lifted the light of His countenance upon them. Better days had come for them but history tells us that most of the apostles would suffer like their master did. Purity of heart may take some Christians to hardship or even martyrdom.

Christianity for the rest of us does call us to purity of heart. God's will is for us to go forward in a life of purity with our Savior Jesus. Desire for that is the biggest challenge. Once real desire is there, I believe God will give us the strength and courage to do what is right and cling to what is pure. Does what I say and do with my gifts, talent and treasure make me pure? That is the question that we all must ask of ourselves.

God is faithful and gives us power to live this way. Walk with Him! Lean on Him! Call upon Him! "Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O Lord." Amen!