**“All In”**

1 John 1

January 1, 2017, David M. Griebner, Riverside UMC

Good morning and Happy New Year! Today we are starting a new series on 1 John. 1 John is a book in the Bible. 1 John is a letter written by the same person who wrote the Gospel of John, the apostle John. There are five chapters in 1 John there are five Sundays in January so we will do one each Sunday.

My goal today, in dealing with the first chapter, is to try to communicate both what John is teaching and what he is feeling. Put another way there is a lot of head and heart in this chapter and in the rest of the letter. And we need to try to appreciate both. What is right belief? What is true? And what does it feel like to embrace this truth with all your heart? To begin I have chosen two stories. I believe that both stories help us with both head and heart. So here’s the first one.

This is a true story told by David Redding. By the way this is the same David Redding who was the pastor of Liberty Presbyterian Church in Powell. He died here in Columbus in 2013. When David was 13 years old his family moved to the country for his father’s health. And when he says country, he means country. He says that they lived so far out that when they wanted to go hunting they had to go toward town. Soon after they moved he acquired a flock of sheep and big, black Scottish Sheep dog he named Teddy. Teddy and David did everything together, including many summer nights just the two of them out in the field with the sheep. They were inseparable, and you know just how inseparable a boy and his dog can be. But then World War II happened and David joined the Navy. How do you tell a dog about a war and the need to go? Fortunately David made it through the war and headed home. He took the bus to the last stop, but it was still fourteen miles from the farm. He got off the bus at 11 p.m. and had to walk the rest of the way. It was two or three a.m. when he got within a half mile of the farm, and pitch black. Suddenly he heard Teddy bark. It was the kind of bark you associate with a warning. David whistled only once. In response there was another bark, not a bark of warning, but a bark of recognition. In the silence that followed he knew that his friend was hurtling toward him in the darkness. He closes the story with a question. “If my dog, without any explanation, would love me and take me back after all that time, wouldn’t my God?” (*Stories for a man’s Heart*, p. 111)

Here’s what John wants us, and everyone, to know. We’ve been loved like this. Actually we’ve been loved far, far, better than this, better than we can imagine by more than we can imagine. We’ve been loved like this not by a dog, not by another human being, and not by anything in this world; we have been loved like this by the One who made everything and who holds everything together. We have been loved like this by the very Source of life itself. And this is something John knows because he as seen it with his own eyes and touched it with his own hands. Listen again. **“**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*.”

See how we have been loved, says John. *“The eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”* We heard Him speak, we saw Him with our own eyes, and touched Him with our own hands. His name is Jesus. John will put it another way in his gospel. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God…The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:1, 14) This is the incarnation, and it is the truth, the bedrock, and the foundation upon which Christianity stands. The God of all time and space, the One who made everything that has been made, the Word of God, Jesus, put on our flesh; He lived our life and died our death in order to rescue us from sin, give us eternal life and set us free from death itself. We’ve been loved like this. Do you know this? Can you feel it? We’ve been loved like this.

But that’s not the whole story. And John knows it. He also knows we can welcome this love or dismiss it, admit our desperate need for it, or try to deny it. Listen again. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9) The love John is talking about is rescuing love, it’s redeeming love, it’s sacrificial love; it’s the blood of Jesus covering our sin. (1 John 1:7) It’s God’s perfect love for a broken and sinful world. And it’s always there, for everyone, but in order to receive this love we have to admit we are sinners, admit we walk in darkness, admit we are broken, and admit we need Jesus. We need everything He has done and everything He offers. We need a Savior. Here’s another story. Unfortunately I’ve learned that this is not a true story, it is a work of fiction, but it still points to this powerful truth.

This is about a man named John Blanchard. John was reading a book in a library in Florida. The person who had donated the book had put some thoughtful, personal notes in the margin that moved him deeply. He discovered that the name of the donor was a woman named Hollis Maynell. With some effort he located Hollis in New York City, and they began to correspond. Shortly after this he too went to war, but they continued to write to each other. Her letters kept him going. He asked for a picture, but she said that if he really cared, it shouldn’t matter what she looked like. He made it through the war and when it was time for him for come home she agreed to meet him in Grand Central Station in New York City at 7 p.m. “You’ll recognize me,” she wrote, “by the rose I’ll be wearing in my lapel.” He said he would be carrying her book. The time came and he began to walk through the station looking for a woman wearing the rose. Suddenly a beautiful woman in a pale green suit began walking toward him. As she passed by she smiled at him and murmured, “Going my way soldier?” He almost turned and went after her. But there was no rose in her lapel. At the same time he saw a woman just ahead who did have a rose in her lapel. She had graying hair and was clearly much older than he was. It was Hollis. He thought of the woman in the green suit and almost turned and followed her. But then he remembered how Hollis’ letters had touched his soul. He made his choice, squared his shoulders, held out the worn blue book he said would identify him to her, saluted and said to the woman wearing the rose, “I’m Lt. John Blanchard, and you must be Miss Maynell. I’m so glad you could meet me. May I take you to dinner?” The older woman smiled, and said, “I don’t know what this is about son, but that young lady in the green suit who just walked by begged me to wear this rose on my coat. She said if you were to ask me out to dinner, I should tell you that she is waiting for you in the restaurant across the street.

The man in the story was tempted. He almost chased the woman in the green dress, and had he done so he would have lost her. Here’s what John wants us to know. *Yes we’ve been loved. The One who made the stars has loved us beyond all comprehension, and yet, to be entirely truthful, we have also walked away from this love.* We’ve forgotten it, put it on the back burner, tried to downplay our need for it, or even denied it all together. But here’s the great irony and the deeper truth. The more we admit our weakness, the more we acknowledge our sin, the more we know that this love is real and that it is our only hope. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” But, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” The more we admit we need a Savior, the more of the Savior we will know. The great love we are offered and our desperate need for it go together; they cannot be separated.

There is a prayer written by John Wesley that beautifully captures this truth. At the beginning of every year, John held a covenant renewal service and this prayer was at the heart of it. Next week, when we are back on schedule, it will be a part of both services, but for today I just want you to listen to it. Listen for how this beautiful prayer captures both the love we have been offered and what our response to it should be.

**I am no longer my own, but Yours.**

**Put me where You want, place me with whom You want.**

**Call me to action for You. Call me to suffering for You.**

**Let me be put to use for You, or let me step aside for You.**

**Let me be filled for You, or let me be empty for You.**

**Let me have everything, let me have nothing.**

**I freely and willingly give all that I am and all that I have to You.**

**And now, wonderful and amazing God,**

**Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,**

**You are mine and I am Yours. Let it be.**

**And may this covenant that I have made on earth continue for all eternity. Amen.**