"Remembering (Who We Are)"

II John 1-13/John 13:33-34/Isaiah 2:2-4

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I. Introduction

I keep my calendar the old-fashioned way. I write appointments down in my "At a Glance, 2 page/week, Weekly Appointment Book." It's 'old school.' But I like it. And I'm a little 'old school' myself.

I carry a pen with it so I can add appointments as they come up. And if something gets cancelled, I just cross it out. It can be a bit of a mess. But it works.

The problem I've had lately is occasionally struggling to read my handwriting. If I'm in a hurry, things can get a little sloppy. It's an uncomfortable feeling knowing that I should be somewhere meeting with someone, but I can't figure out where and who. Fortunately, that rarely happens.

I attach a paper clip to some pages as a type of bookmark so I can turn to the current week immediately. It's 'low tech' and 'old school.' But it too works fine.

As you can probably guess I catch some grief sometimes for not being more 'high tech' and use a planning calendar in my I-Phone. And that's fair enough. I could. But for me my "At a Glance, 2 page/week, Weekly Appointment Book" works just fine. It has for over 30 years. And I suppose it might be my little 'push back' to becoming too dependent on technology.

So whether you use 'high tech' or a 'low tech' "At a Glance, 2 page/week, Weekly Appointment Book," what's going on? What's going on is something to help us remember. With all the busyness, people, and appointments in life, we need something to help us remember. And I don't know about you, but I have a hard time remembering what I'm supposed to be doing tomorrow, let alone next month or next year. I need something to help me remember. You probably do too.

"Helping us remember." That's the strange thing going on in this small book in the New Testament called "II John." It's not long enough to have chapters. It just has verses, maybe like a brief letter you might write. It has 13 verses to be exact. That's it, 13 verses.

And here's the thing; there's nothing new in these 13 verses. Everything said in II John has already been said in I John. I've never preached on II John. I asked Bill, and he has never preached on II John either. And I found out we're in good company. John Calvin wrote commentaries on the Gospel of John and I John, but not II or III John. And there is no record of Martin Luther every preaching on II or III John.

So what's the point of II John? I think the point is that this brief 1st C letter to a church in Asia Minor (now called Turkey) is to help them remember. It's to help this church remember what they heard and read and learned from I John about living the Christian faith. It's to say it again amidst all the noise and religions and choices in life. It's saying, "Remember this."

So let's see what this letter encouraged those 1st C Christians to remember. And who knows, maybe it's good for us to remember it too.

II. Text and Brief Exegesis

What I would like to do today is a "didactic or teaching sermon." We'll go through these 13 verses a few at a time and I'll make some comments on them.

A. Salutation (Read vv.1-3). The author of the letter calls himself "the elder." Most likely he is an elder, or leader, in the Christian community that developed around the teaching of John the disciple of Jesus in the area of Ephesus. The Gospel of John, I, II and III John and Revelation use similar language and have some similar theological themes, so they may have all come from the same community. The writer of the letter, "the elder," is part of that church and assumes some authority in the letter.

The recipient of the letter is called "the elect lady and her children." While it could be a person, more likely it is a church and its members. And while it was probably written to a specific church, this letter called II John was probably passed around between churches in the area.

These opening verses have the typical language and theology in John: love, truth, knowledge, and abiding. Love is how faith is lived out. Truth is the conviction that God is incarnate in Jesus Christ. Knowledge is about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And abiding has to do with a spiritual connection with the risen Christ through obedience to his teaching.

B. Body of Letter (vv.4-11)

1. Christian Conduct (Read vv.4-6). This is the first thing the writer asks the church to remember; the way Christians live out their faith together. The specific word used is "walk." We hear the same idea in text from Isaiah 2: "Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that God may teach us his ways and that we may **walk** in his paths." Just as walking is about one step at a time, so Christian living is about one choice at a time. And not it's not about "me and Jesus," but rather "we and Jesus."

And that "walking," that choosing, that way of life together is about love. The Greek word is "agape." It's the giving of self for the other. Feeling may or may not be a part of it, but it has to do with action; doing it. It's connected to Jesus' "new commandment" from John 13: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love

for one another." Jesus demonstrated that love. And Jesus commands that love to be lived out in the life of the church together. Christians are to remember this command of Jesus that they first heard when they came to belief. Love is the foundation of their life together. And it is the witness they make to the non-Christians all around them.

2. Christian Confession (Read vv.7-11). The second thing the writer wants the church to remember is a confession of faith about Jesus. The theological term is Christology. It has to do with God's presence in Jesus Christ called incarnation.

There was a philosophical movement popular in the 1st C called "Gnosticism." Generally, it taught that the physical body was bad, and the spirit was good. Thus, when it was translated into Christian faith, it was believed that if God, who is Spirit and good, is incarnate in Jesus Christ, then Jesus Christ was really Spirit, and only appeared to have a physical body. The early Christian community labeled this a heresy for many reasons. None the least of which is that if Jesus was not really a physical person, then he really didn't live, suffer, die on the cross, and rise from the dead. You need a physical body to do that.

Evidently this teaching was infiltrating the church. So this letter is written to help Christians remember what they were first taught and believed about Jesus. And in the strongest possible terms they are to understand this teaching and those who spread it as "antichrist." They are to have nothing to do with this teaching and those who teach it.

Honestly, there has always been some mystery in the incarnation; how God is present in Jesus Christ. So there's some room for wondering. But amidst that mystery and wondering is the necessary affirmation that Jesus Christ was fully a human being like each of us. To affirm something else is to wander into heresy and deny the witness of the Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

C. Conclusion (Read vv. 12-13). The letter concludes in typical fashion. More could be written, but "the elder" hopes to visit and address some other issues. Greetings come from "the children of your elect sister," which are the members of a sister church to which the writer belongs.

III. Theological Reflections

As we discussed earlier, nothing new is stated in II John. The Christians who first read the letter had heard it all before in I John (and also in the Gospel of John). So what's the point? The point of II John, I think, is for them to remember. Specifically, they are to remember that "agape" love is to be the way of their life together as a church. And they are to stand fast by the teaching they first heard, that Jesus Christ had a physical body like each of them, so his life, death and resurrection were real.

Remembering is important. When I officiate weddings and come to the exchange of rings, I tell the couple: “You have chosen rings as symbols of the promises that you make to each other this day. They are beautiful and strong, and so may your marriage be. In the morning before you’ve had that first cup of coffee, and at midday when you take a break, and in the evening when you welcome the quiet of a day coming to a close, may you look at these rings and remember this day and the promises you made to each other.” Rings are about remembering.

Remembering is important. At the end of each day, my dad would empty the contents of his pockets and put the stuff in a drawer by the backdoor. One day I noticed amidst the coins, pocketknife, and keys he had a little pocket cross. So I asked him about the pocket cross. He told me that he had the cross in his pocket so that when he put his hand in his pocket he felt the cross and remembered he was a Christian and wanted to act like a Christian out doing his job for the electrical power company. A small thing, but a good thing. A pocket cross is about remembering.

Remembering is important. At the funerals I lead, the 23rd Psalm is always a part of the service. And when I read “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters…” I can see some people whispering the words they know. And there’s a peace that settles down on everyone. You can feel it. The 23rd Psalm is a song and prayer of trust. And it is not part of the service because it’s new. Rather, just the opposite. It is part of the service because it’s familiar. And we remember the words from the Psalm that have been written on our hearts. The 23rd Psalm is about remembering.

Remembering is important in Christian faith. Amidst all the busyness, people, choices, and ups/downs of life, it’s important to remember who we are, how we live together, what we believe, and what we hope. Remembering matters.