

**Stories: Sharing Authentic Faith**  
**Sermon 1-21-18**  
**By Pastor Curtis Dehmey**

**1 John 1:5-10**

<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; <sup>7</sup>but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

<sup>8</sup>If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

**Message:**

Have you ever wondered where this idea of “Sunday’s Best” came from? You know...that you dress up in your nicest clothes for church on Sundays. According to an article written by Viola and Barna on [truthaccordingtoscripture.com](http://truthaccordingtoscripture.com), the practice of “Sunday’s Best” first began “...in the first half of the nineteenth century, first in England, then northern Europe and America, as a consequence of the industrial revolution and the emergence of the middle class.” Before the industrial revolution there was no middle class. The economic classes were essentially divided between the have’s and the have not’s. When the industrial revolution arrived, it gave the have not’s the means to purchase clothing that would make them appear like the have’s. Before the industrial revolution, “Common folks had only one or two sets of clothes, made of coarse, drab fabric. One set of clothes was for working in the field, thus getting dirty and tattered; the other was for going into town, and therefore was kept cleaner to avoid public revulsion. In other words, ‘dressing up’ for anything was never an option for anyone but the wealthiest nobility.” As the middle class rose and more people began to dress in nice attire, many Christian groups opposed this practice because it was a representation of being too worldly. Including well-known Christian figures such as John Wesley. Those in favor of this “Sunday’s Best” practice moralized the issue. That for mature Christians and Christians of integrity that “Sunday’s Best” was a reflection of their commitment to Christ. In order for “mature” Christians to uphold such a standard, some would carry nice shoes and stockings to church meetings, putting them on right before they entered the church.

And then as they left the church they would switch into their normal attire. Some would even "... pawn the suit on Monday for money to live on during the week, only to redeem it again on Saturday for worship the next morning." Looking back on the origination of this practice, it not only helps us understand it better, but may help us determine if it's a practice that is genuine. I know here at Providence this is not the standard. And I believe that's a good thing. But this practice shows us something. While some moralized the issue, it seems in hindsight that it was more about appearances. That people wanted to appear one way so that others would not know the realities of their lives. They want to appear as if they have wealth, even though they may not have wealth. Or if their wealth is growing, they want to flaunt that to their friends and family of their newfound success. This all of course is vanity.

We are subject to the temptation of vanity in the church. We want to appear one way, but actually another is happening. We want to appear that everything is great in our lives, but in reality we are really struggling. We want to appear as if we are this really devout Christian because we go to church on Sunday mornings, but throughout the week there is no such representation of our faith. In our passage today, I believe John is calling our attention to such temptations and vanity. Pay attention in particular to this phrase "If we say..." <sup>5</sup>"This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true..." Ouch...<sup>6</sup>"If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie..." I'm sure none of us thinks of ourselves as liars. But what if lying isn't as explicit as telling someone a fib? What if lying goes a step deeper into not sharing what's really going on in our lives with those around us? Skipping ahead, <sup>8</sup>"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Another ouch. How many of us believe that we do not sin? I'll admit, sometimes I think I am without sin. Mainly because I can't think any sin in my life. But if I can't think of any sin, does that mean that I am without sin? Probably not. Whether I can name it or not doesn't determine my sinfulness or sinlessness. This is the deception. To think that we are without sin. That we don't continually need the grace of Jesus. Skipping ahead again to the last verse, <sup>10</sup>"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." John goes a step further. Not only is it a deception to ourselves to believe that we are without sin, but we make Christ out to be a liar. We are misrepresenting Jesus. We are misrepresenting the word and truth of Christ.

At first glance, you could think that John is calling us to perfection. <sup>7</sup>"but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." We might think

that John is saying that we have to be perfectly in the light of Christ, without sin, in order to have fellowship with other believers. But if we take a look at verse 9, “<sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Righteousness or perfection is not ours to attain. It is only by the confession of our sins and forgiveness of Christ that will make ourselves perfect before God. I think what John is calling us towards is honesty and authenticity. Honesty ourselves. And authenticity with others. When we think about our story, to not just highlight the good stuff and ignore the bad stuff. To ignore that sometimes we are in dark places or at least estranged from God. The more we ignore the darkness, the more we give darkness power in our lives. Or you may have heard this phrase before, “Just like mold, sin grows in the dark. When we keep it hidden, it has more power over us.” John is calling us to be more genuine about the ups and downs of the faith journey with those around us.

Sometimes we think we can trick people. That we can hide our wounds and our sins. But if we hide our sins and our wounds, they will eventually get exposed. And in the process they will eat away at us. When I was a chaplain, I had a fellow chaplain who was Evangelical. At this point in my faith journey I had a disdain for Evangelicals. I think mainly because my faith formation was in an Evangelical/Anabaptist environments. And as I started to question certain beliefs in that faith formation I was quickly shut-down or quieted. As if I were not to ask such questions about theology and faith. I was just to accept what I’ve been fed. I was hurt by this attempt to stunt my faith development. And so as I went to seminary, I discovered that my questions were okay and in fact were welcomed. Some even commiserated with me in my hurt from the Evangelical community. I wasn’t alone in my hurt and disdain. When I was in chaplaincy, I tried to hide my disdain for and hurt from certain streams of Evangelicalism. So this fellow Evangelical Chaplain somehow picked up on that I had this disdain for Evangelicalism and called my attention to it in one of our group learning sessions. And as I processed what my colleague told me, I had a private session with my supervisor to process more. I remember my supervisor acknowledging that my woundedness from Evangelicalism and disdain for it seems to ooze out. Meaning, I try to hide this hurt and disdain, but somehow it comes out. In backwards and weird ways. Or as he put it, “It comes out sideways.” I was faced with this reality that if I wanted to provide care to all patients and minister to all people, in particular Evangelical patients, I had to address this hurt and disdain. So I made it a point to address it over the next few months. Well...God has a great sense of humor. At this point in time, I started to date Christine. Who might have identified more with the Evangelical stream than myself at the time. So if I wanted to be with this wonderful and beautiful woman, I had to address these issues. And Christine and I were weird. I doubt many people begin their relationship hashing

out theological issues. I mean, we were nerds about this. For the first month of dating, we went way deep intellectually and worked out many of the theological issues that caused concern for our relationship. It was hard. Full of conflict. It was full of emotion. It was full of contemplation. Looking back at this, Christine and I laugh at our ridiculousness. We were obviously meant for each other. Strangely, it was through my relationship with Christine that I began to heal from my wounds from and disdain with Evangelicalism. Even though I may still quip with certain beliefs, I landed in a spot where I could respect many them and not bad mouth them. If you think you can hide your wounds, your sins, your darkness, you can't. It will find a way out eventually. Whether you tell someone or whether it comes out sideways, it will come out.

As we think about testifying of your, my, our story, do you ever find it interesting to hear a story that is all positive? That you highlight just the good stuff? If you think about great movies or novels, what do they all have in common? Does the movie have a mountaintop experience all throughout the movie? Does the novel highlight all the hard and depressing stuff? No. In fact, it would be a really boring movie or novel if it just highlighted the hard stuff or if it just highlighted the good stuff. Not only would it be boring, but it wouldn't connect with the audience. Because that's not reality. That's not our story. That's not the story of Christ. We wouldn't identify with the story. When we tell our story, it is tempting to just highlight the good stuff because we don't want people to see the blemishes or the dark spots in our life. But again, if you just share the good stuff, the positive stuff, then it won't connect with anyone. And vice versa. If you just share the bad stuff, it also won't connect with anyone. In order to have any connection with others we have to be willing to be vulnerable. And that is no easy task.

One of my favorite books in recent years has been Brene Brown's book, "Daring Greatly." One of my biggest takeaways from her book was the interconnection between vulnerability and trust. We all crave for relationships. We all crave for friendships and loved ones. But if there is no vulnerability in the relationship, there can be no relationship. If you aren't willing to share your ups and your downs, your concerns or fears, your joys and your excitement, then you cut yourself off from relationship. When we are vulnerable, we begin to trust another with our story. The opposite is also true. In order to be vulnerable, we have to have a willingness to trust someone with our story. Now, this doesn't mean that we should trust every single person with our story. Some people are just untrustworthy until proven otherwise. But if we don't trust anyone with our story, then there is no vulnerability. And again, then there is no relationship. To connect it to our passage, if we are unwilling to be transparent with or to trust fellow believers with our story, then sin or darkness will most likely stay in the dark and

will continue to eat away at you. It will eat away at you and it will ooze out in ways you didn't expect. The more we own our story and tell our story to those whom we trust, love and share our faith, the more we can create a Christian bond. Maybe even solidarity and healing in telling our story. And I'll even take that step further, when we share with non-believers our story of the ups and downs, people connect with that. And your transparency may even bring more people into relationship with Christ.

As I call you to share your story over the next year with all of us, just like Kathy did earlier, this is a call to entrust your fellow believers with your story. I've known many of you for a couple of years and I still don't know your faith story. What brought you to faith in Jesus? What were the key points in your life? I would venture to say that I'm not the only one who doesn't know your faith story. To have you share with us in worship serves a couple of purposes. One, you get a chance to recap and own your story. To review your life and say, "Yeah...this IS what God has done in my life and it's pretty incredible." Two, it's to give us all the opportunity to connect with you. We might hear a piece of your story and say, "me too." It might even give you relief knowing that you are not the only one who struggles with such and such. And three, this is your practice ground. I get that it can be intimidating to share your faith story with non-believers. Why not get comfortable with telling your faith story among believers first? So that when you have the opportunity to share your faith story with non-believers it comes more naturally. I mean, think about it. The more you tell a story, the more refined it becomes. I may tell people about my miraculous broken ankle healing experience and each time I tell them I refine the telling of that story. Maybe emphasizing certain details over others. Maybe being sure that I tell them what I was feeling and thinking each time I tell the story to emphasize the depth of the experience. Each time we tell our story of faith, we grow more comfortable with it and we own it that much more.

What I'm calling you to, Providence Church, and I believe God is calling you to, is to be more transparent about your story. To be authentic about your faith experience. To highlight the good, the bad and the ugly. Your story is significant. Whether you think so or not. But we can't act like sin and darkness doesn't exist in our lives. It will ooze out. That would ignore the impact of what Christ did for us. If we didn't have sin and darkness in our lives, then what Christ did wouldn't matter. It would make him out to be a liar. God is calling you to be honest with yourself. Tony Evans once put it this way, "A fake I.D. is normally used to give the impression that a young person is older than they really are. Many Christians come to church with a fake I.D., giving the impression that all is well when all is not. We show an I.D. of harmony when our lives are really in discord. We show an I.D. of having it all together when we don't even know where all the parts have

gone. However, God saved us for authentic relationships and fellowship with one another...” If you are in a dark place, I encourage you to share that with another believer today. If you have sinned, I encourage you to confess that today. If you have ignored certain realities for more pleasant realities, I encourage you to be honest with yourself today. Because it’s only when we bring the dark things to light, that we can experience healing. That we can experience the fullness of Christ’s salvation. That we can testify of our story in Jesus Christ. Amen.