



**The Letters of John  
John 1, 2 and 3**

**Spring Bible Study  
2018**

**6:00 pm – 7:00  
Wednesday Evenings:  
April 4, 11, 18 and 25**



**Central Lutheran  
MINNEAPOLIS**

Exploring the promise of God for all  
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# Wednesday, April 4

## The Schedule:

Wednesday, April 4

Introduction to the Letters of John

Wednesday, April 11

1 John

Wednesday, April 18

2 John

Wednesday, April 25

3 John and Themes for Life

## The Class

As always, remember the main invitation: always, always come to class. If you did not have a chance to get to the reading, come to class. If you are away for a week, or two, come to class. God is calling and inviting you to be a part of this holy conversation, so you are welcome for all or even just one of the sessions.

## Christ Care Prayers

We begin each class with a time for prayer. You can share your joys or concerns as we begin, or if you would rather share them before class let the Pastor know and they will be included. With all prayer, the concerns and celebrations we offer as we begin are confidential to our time together.

## Class and Reading

This spring session is light on the reading, the letters are not that long (2 and 3 John are a page). The devotional nature of the letters will be found in returning to them each day over the next three weeks. At the end of each session there will be the assigned reading and some questions for reflection, but they will be much shorter and less involved than previous studies. (The questions, though, are as deep).

## Introduction to 1-3 John

As we begin tonight, we will take a moment to walk through these three Letters of John, highlighting a few of the well-known passages and introducing you to the themes that will guide our conversation over the next three weeks.

While scholars continue the debate authorship, the language follows that of John the gospel writer. We will follow that assumption for our time together. Authorship is important, but not essential for our time.

Questions for tonight:

1. How does your identity as a child of God shape your daily life? How does it give you hope, guide your interactions and draw you deeper into a relationship with God?
2. How does baptism shape your daily life? How does baptism connect you to all the children of God?
3. In what ways does gratitude flow out of your identity as a child of God?
4. How does gratitude shape your vulnerability and acknowledgment of sin?
5. How do you understand sin?

### **Reading for April 11**

The essential struggle underneath the Letters of John is rooted in conflict. I know you are surprised that a Christian community could have conflict. We listen carefully to learn about the conflict, but we will only know in part because all we have are these letters and the images of the struggle that they teach us.

There was a struggle in this faith community and some of the congregation left. Many scholars agree that this letter, and the next two were written in response to the departure. Perhaps they were written as words of encouragement, or perhaps to teach the faithful that remained in the community?

You will hear about the conflict in chapter 2: 18-27 and in chapter 4: 1-3. You will also hear, which strongly echoes John the gospel writer's teaching about Jesus, that we are people who love Jesus Christ and love one another. The Bible, Church, worship and life together are all the faithful adventure of learning to love God and love one another more and more. Any departure from this path of love is a departure from the essential teaching of Jesus Christ. Love is what binds us to God and to one another.

Set aside some time to read 1 John. There are 5 chapters so you could read a chapter a day, or you can easily read it in one setting. It is less a letter than, well, a sermon or meditation. One devotional approach is to read it all each night or morning as part of your devotions.

A few questions, comments to reflect on this week:

1. Docetism is the big “25-cent” word for this letter’s challenge. The group that left were followers of the belief in Docetism (that Jesus was only a spirit, not of physical flesh). The early Church’s response in the Creed was “born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate...” What does Jesus humanity mean for you? Why is it important for you that Jesus was human, as well as divine/spirit?
2. As you read chapter one, do you hear John’s Gospel ringing through? How? Does the close of chapter one sound familiar?
3. In chapter two we hear the phrase, “little children,” this is a term of endearment. Antichrist was a term for those who opposed “sound doctrine.” How do you understand that idea?
4. In chapter 3 the call to love begins to shine though. What does it mean to love? How is love essential for Christian community? How does love in community reveal the truth about the depth of faith within the community?
5. Chapter 4 is perhaps the second-best reflection on love in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 13 may be in the number one spot. What do you hear? What is inspiring in this chapter?
6. Chapter 5 draws the themes of the meditation to a close. It is a moving statement of faith. Verse 13 echoes John 20:31, calling for faith. What jumps out at you in these closing verses?
7. What is the challenge in John’s call that the love of the faithful within the life of the community reveals the depth of faith? It is a truth, John teaches. How is this a challenge to us today? What are the nuances to love? What are the challenges to love? Does the call to love lead us into the safety of community or out into the places of discomfort where the community is called to live?

# Wednesday, April 11

## Christ Care Prayer

### Review of the themes of 1-3 John

#### Conversation on 1 John, all chapters

- Questions from the reading (on page 4)
- Passages that you want to pause to discuss
- Conversation on Docetism and early heresies

#### Reading for April 18

This week you will read 2 John, which is short – like one page short, like you can read it in 10 minutes. As we continue to grow deep, we learn that sometimes the best things come in small boxes. Sometimes the greatest challenge comes in the small box, as well.

At the heart of this second letter is the challenge of Docetism. Once again John calls for a faith in Jesus as both human and divine. Once again John calls for love. But now, we are challenged by John's call to show no hospitality to those who separate, who do not love and hold to the faith in Jesus who has revealed love. There is quite a bit to talk about with this moment in scripture, for sure. It arrives in the opposite, often that we remove ourselves from those who do not agree with us. We are called to stay connected to all in love, the turn in 2 John is that we do not show hospitality to those who leave, who tear apart of the community, who fail to love and stay connected.

1. As you begin reading, "elect lady" is an old term for a Christian congregation. What does it mean that he writes to the whole community?
2. Where are we grounded as a community of faith?
3. Verse 9 is interesting, going beyond the teaching of Christ is the problem. What does it mean to go beyond? What is the essential message? How do we "add" what works for us to the message of Jesus? Any examples?
4. Verse 10 is sticky, we will need to spend some time talking about this. It may be best to get at it from our own experience. We will need to be careful not to throw stones, or try to put others into categories.
5. We will also need to talk about when a faith community may need to deny hospitality? Any examples come to mind of when that may need to happen, when others have removed themselves from the community and are now tearing at it from the outside? Any examples of faith communities that "go beyond" the pathway of love?

6. How does the letter close? Is there wisdom here for us, found in John's yearning to come and talk face to face? What is the challenge to face to face conversation?
7. How are we called to make room for God in our lives and to make room for God to work between us? How does the call to love keep us open to one another? How is this letter a deep challenge to anything, topic or issue that we might decide will be our divider?

# April 18 Class

## Christ Care Prayer

### Review of the themes of 1-3 John

#### Conversation on 2 John, all chapters

- Questions from the reading (pages 5-6)
- Passages that you want to pause to discuss
- Conversation on Docetism and early heresies

### Reading for April 25

3 John is as short as 2 John. If the devotional approach worked last week, take time again for a morning or evening read of this short meditation. Where 2 John was to the community, 3 John is to a specific person, Gaius. It is helpful to put yourself in Gaius' shoes. The letter celebrates Gaius' hospitality, and critiques Diotrephes' opposition. It is an interesting guide for a life of faith, rooted in radical hospitality that struggles to walk away from the easy path of critique.

1. What does it mean to show hospitality? How do you understand hospitality as one of the deepest of Christian ventures?
2. When is it easy to show hospitality? When have you found it challenging?
3. How often is criticism connected to the struggle for authority? As we have discussed previously, our culture distrusts authority. We are a part of the culture, we too have a distrust of authority. Yet, how will we learn and grow without the various places and people where authority is needed? Authority is given, what happens to any community if we do not "give" this authority?
4. What happens when given authority is not used in love, for the building up of community?
5. There is power in false charges, it is breaking the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment – bearing false witness. In Lent we reflected on all the commandments, but here we return to one that we found to be crucial for community, for our intrapersonal relationships. How do our words, our innuendo and insinuations take away the authority needed in community?
6. Face to face, this closes the letter, again, what can we learn from this?
7. What does it mean to greet the friends by name?

# April 25 Class

## Christ Care Prayer

## Review of the themes of 1-3 John

### Conversation on 3 John

- Questions from the reading (page 7)
- Passages that you want to pause to discuss

### Closing conversation

1. What is the role of a faith community? When are leaders called to challenge us, what will be our guide?
2. As we struggle with the notion of authority, what are the ways that we can find a way to agreed authority for our lives?
3. How is love our guide, both love for God and one another?
4. How are you called to show hospitality and maintain the bonds of love?
5. What does radical hospitality mean for you, grounded in love?
6. Is it enough today for a faith community's bond to be a shared faith in Jesus Christ?
7. What then of inclusion and exclusion?