

EMBRACING THE MESS
Losers of the World, Unite!

1 John 1:3-10

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October 16, 2016

LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/embracing-the-mess-losers-of-the-world-unite/>

Today we launch a new sermon series, looking at the third of five sails, as we catch the wind of God's Spirit, allowing God to lead us into God's future. This third sail is authentic relationships, or as we are calling this series, "Embracing The Mess." Our theme sentence, our preferred future is this: **First Baptist Church is an imperfect family bound together by love and grace. We practice radical hospitality, affirm everyone's journey and celebrate the living Christ working among us. We love each other.** But for this to happen, there must be brokenness and honesty--more than we would like!

Charles Swindoll wrote about an ex-Marine who became a Christian once lamented that he missed the old fellowship of the guys gathering at the bar, sharing a few laughs and beers, telling stories. Now, he said, he had no one to tell his troubles to. He added, "I can't find anybody in church who will put their arms around me and tell me I'm still OK. Man, it's kinda lonely in here" [*Dropping Your Guard*]. What's wrong with the church, when there is more honesty in a local tavern or at an AA meeting than in our fellowship? Paul Tournier once wrote, "Nothing makes us so lonely as our secrets." And this fear of being known leads to hiding and pretending.

I love the story about the pastor who was visiting in the home of a farm family. Their little boy burst inside the house, not noticing their guest. He shouted, "I killed a rat. I stomped him, smushed him, kicked him and his guts--" Then he saw the pastor, and said, "And then God called him home." We go into that Sunday-School-pretend-mode. And we're not real.

In this political season, we could all wish that every candidate would cease posturing and practice transparency. But that's the point, isn't it? Even if the world does not, followers of Christ are to set the bar high, to model that honesty and confession.

Let me ask you something. How did the stories of the disciples' failure, betrayal and sin make it in to the Gospels? Simple. They told it on themselves! They were real, transparent. They were honest and confessed those things. Earlier in the service, we read from the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-10). Only when we are real and broken do we experience the Kingdom. This is Jesus' clarion call: "Losers of the world, unite! And form the Church! The messy, imperfect, broken, honest Church!"

Which leads us our text. Note in v. 3 that John mentions the senses being impacted by Jesus' arrival in our real, messy world. You see, a movement was afoot in those days (and now) to say

that Christ wasn't "real," or human. It was all smoke and mirrors, just sort of up in the clouds. No. He was really here in this messy world. But a pretend savior leads to pretend people.

Read v. 7 again. "...the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin from all sin..." Present tense, continuous action, on and on. In v. 7, horizontal and vertical fellowship are connected. When we get real and honest with God, we also move closer to each other (and the opposite is true!). When I read v. 8, I am reminded of a woman with whom I was visiting, sharing faith in Christ. Having been steeped in a works-righteousness system, she told me she had no sin. I handed her my New Testament and asked her to read these verses. Tears came to her eyes. You see, honesty and confession is the way we come into the faith and first trust Christ, and it's how we continue.

And how do we live in that continual fountain of forgiveness? Read v. 9. A great moment occurs when we honestly come before God and open our lives to God, and to others! The greatest truth is not that we are sinners but that God in Christ loves, heals and forgives. He sits down with us and says I want a relationship with you and if you'll let me, I'll deal with these sins [this is a beautiful image I adapted from Brennan Manning, *Ragamuffin Gospel*, pp. 251-252].

But when we say we have no sin, we call God a liar (v. 10). Let me say it bluntly. The only way to have a relationship with God is to stop pretending and to be honest. The only way to have a relationship with others is to stop pretending and be honest.

In 1787, it is reported that a Russian man named Grigory Potemkin erected a portable, fake village in order to impress the visiting Empress Catherine II. So from Russia, a Potemkin Village is used to describe anything literal or figurative that is built in order to deceive others into thinking the situation is better than it really is. Here, you see a cartoon of a building facade only. And then man is impressed! "Ah, prosperity!" What Potemkin Village have you constructed, trying to fool God and others? Why not stop pretending and start trusting? Why not get real? Read vv. 7-10 again.