

Kizuna article: "The Three Letters of John"

Pastor Sarah Wilson

During the Sundays between Easter and Pentecost, we had readings from the First Letter of John. In the English congregation we listened to all five chapters of First John, and I preached on them.

First John is not an easy book to read. It's more like a long poem than a letter. The themes of love, truth, sin, and Jesus twirl around each other. They repeat and correct themselves and start over again. I think First John would be best experienced as a live performance by a poet, instead of read quietly at home.

First John has a sequel—actually, two! There is also a Second Letter of John and even a Third Letter of John. The Third Letter of John is the only "Third" in the whole Bible! Also, Second John and Third John are the two shortest books in the whole Bible.

Second John and Third John are more like actual letters than First John. They sound more personal. Second John is addressed to "the elect lady and her children." This might mean a real woman and her family, but it might also be a symbol for the church. Third John is addressed to a man named Gaius. It's a very practical letter, dealing with one difficult colleague and one helpful colleague. I guess some things never change!

Second John and Third John never come up in the Bible readings in church, but since I preached all the way through First John, I decided to go ahead and do the whole collection of Letters of John. So on Pentecost I preached on Second John, and on Trinity Sunday I preached on Third John.

Of course, I didn't actually preach in church on these two Sundays, because the church was still closed. I only preached to a microphone in my home office. Members of the congregation had to listen to the sermon on YouTube.

What really surprised and moved me was to discover a sentence at the end of both Second John and Third John. It reads: "Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete."

When these letters were written, travel was difficult, dangerous, and time-consuming. Members of different churches didn't get many chances to see each other. So they wrote letters instead.

Even though our situation is different, we feel the same way. "I would rather not use paper or ink"—and I would rather not use email or YouTube. Instead, "I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face," back together again in church. Then "our joy may be complete."

I'm glad you can read these words, and that you can participate in worship online. But our joy will be complete when we gather together again in person, and talk to each other face to face.