

# Morning Worship Services

Sunday, March 30, 2008

***“Abiding in Christ: Empowered by the Holy Spirit”***

1 John 2:27

Dean K. Wilson

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him. *1 John 2:27*

***BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ!***

How many of you heard the buzzing of your conscience during the week? Did you respond, as Dr. Mains suggested last Sunday, in order to keep a clear conscience?

I don't know about you, but I must admit that some days I hear the “BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ” far too often. I worked very hard this past week not to push the “STOP” button and silence that warning buzzer. How about you?

Warnings can be a very good thing. Do anyone of you remember when cars first came out with a buzzer on the speedometer that would warn you when you went over the speed limit you had set?

Or, how about radar detectors—remember them? I have a friend, Wayne, up in Massachusetts who used to live each day on the empowerment of his radar detector.

One day he was cruising along in his Lincoln Town Car at about 75 mph in a 55 mph zone. He crested a hill and, to his chagrin, spotted a Massachusetts state policeman leaning across the hood of his police car pointing the radar gun right at Wayne.

Wayne's foot instinctively popped off the gas pedal. He gave his radar detector a very annoying slap with the back of his hand because it hadn't warned him of the impending speed trap.

As he cruised by the state policeman still going well over 70 mph, he expected a flurry of activity that would include the officer diving for the inside of his car to give chase.

Instead, in his rear view mirror, he saw the officer follow him with his turning body as Wayne sailed by, lift the radar gun, look into the business end of the gun, and then slam it down on the hood of the car two or three times. Apparently the reason why Wayne's radar detector did not actuate was that the police officer's radar gun wasn't working. The officer knew instinctively that Wayne was speeding, but he had no proof. Wayne credits his escape to his Irish luck.

Warnings. Sometimes it seems like we're surrounded by warnings. The apostle John felt that way, too, as he sat down to write this letter to the churches in Asia Minor—that part of the world we now call Turkey.

You see, John had heard reports that some very troubling individuals had begun to attend the services of the churches.

Belief in Christ had flourished throughout the area. In the more than half-century since Jesus had been crucified, rose from the grave, and ascended into heaven, countless thousands of souls had responded to the

convicting power of the Holy Spirit and acknowledged God's claim on their lives. But, when he looked at what was going on in the churches, John was concerned.

So, he decided to write them a letter and encourage them to hold fast to the teachings that formed the foundation of the gospel message. He wanted them to remember what they had learned. He wanted them to hang on tightly to what he had taught them about the Gospel. Even more importantly, he wanted them to continue to *remain* in Christ.

Notice the context of our passage for this morning when we begin reading a few verses back, let's say, from 1 John 2:18:

<sup>18</sup> Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

<sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. <sup>21</sup> I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. <sup>22</sup> Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup> No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

<sup>24</sup> See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. <sup>25</sup> And this is what he promised us—even eternal life.

<sup>26</sup> I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. <sup>27</sup> As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

John seems particularly concerned about this group of people in the church that he calls the "antichrists."

Antichrist. It's kind of a funny term, isn't it? Antichrist. Almost sounds scary—at least to me it does.

"Who are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm one of those 'antichrists.'"

It doesn't sound like a label that anyone would quickly and unashamedly give to himself or herself, does it?

Antichrist: "Against Christ" or "Outside of Christ" or "Away from Christ." At least that's the sense of the Greek word John uses in the original text of his letter.

Since we've been talking about abiding in Christ or remaining in Christ since January, it would seem that someone "outside of Christ" or "away from Christ" or "against Christ" might present the polar opposite when compared to someone who was allowing the Holy Spirit to enable him or her to remain in Christ.

The sense of what John is trying to say to the believers in the early churches was, "Watch out that you do not become led astray by the teaching of these folks who are outside of Christ. They are right there among

you. They may even appear to have all the trappings and language of a true believer. But they are really impostors, so watch out!"

Impostor. Now there is another emotionally charged word. Who wants to be labeled an impostor?

"I believe I will seek help from my physician. And, I sure hope she isn't an impostor."

Is that how we talk? Of course not. We expect the people we turn to for help, guidance, assistance, care—we expect them to be the genuine article. In fact, the last thing we would ever expect would be for one of the people we rely on to actually be an impostor.

Impostor. It sounds like a very negative word. It has a nasty quality to it. It smacks of deception and trickery.

But do you know what? Not all impostors intend harm. Some impostors become impostors because they don't know how to become real.

Let me illustrate by sharing the story of such a man. The man's name was Ferdinand Waldo Demara, Jr.

Demara, known in his hometown as "Fred," was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1921. A Roman Catholic, Fred tried unsuccessfully to enter a Trappist monastery in 1935. Two attempts later it seemed that the cloistered life did not agree with him and he joined the U.S. Army in 1941.

The following year, Demara began a pattern of living that would persist for the next 20 years. This pattern consisted of assuming other people's identities, often for the purpose of doing good deeds, but always clouded by some self-aggrandizing benefit to Fred, himself. Fred started his new lives by borrowing the name of Anthony Ignolia, an army buddy, and by going AWOL.

After two more tries in monasteries, he joined the Navy. He did not reach the position he wanted, faked his suicide, borrowed another name, Robert Linton French, and became a religiously oriented psychologist. Both Navy and Army caught him eventually and he served 18 months in prison.

Out of prison, Fred continued his pattern of living. A string of pseudo-academic positions followed. In many cases, his students credited Fred, in his various false identities, of making a profound difference in their academic careers. Many said that Fred was the best teacher they had ever had.

During Demara's "careers" he was, among other things, a civil engineer, a sheriff's deputy, an assistant prison warden, a doctor of applied psychology, a hospital orderly, a lawyer, a child-care expert, a Benedictine monk, a Trappist monk, an editor, a cancer researcher, and a teacher. One teaching job led to another six month stint in prison.

Fred's most famous exploit was to masquerade as surgeon Dr. Joseph Cyr aboard HMCS *Cayuga*, a Royal Canadian Navy destroyer, during the Korean War. He managed to improvise successful surgeries and fend off infection with generous amounts of penicillin.

The story of the heroic and life-saving removal of a bullet from a wounded man ended up in Canadian newspapers. One person reading the report was the mother of the real Dr. Joseph Cyr. At the time, she knew that her son was actually practicing medicine in Grand Falls, New Brunswick. She immediately contacted the authorities.

When news of the impostor reached the *Cayuga*, still on duty off Korea, Captain James Plomer at first refused to believe that Demara was not really Dr. Joseph Cyr. Ultimately, the Canadian Navy chose to not press charges, and Demara returned to the United States.

Fred never seemed to get much monetary gain in what he was doing—just temporary respectability, a sense of belonging to something bigger than himself, and the opportunity to help other people at the same time he was helping himself.

Many of Demara's unsuspecting employers have stated that, under other circumstances, they would have been very satisfied with Demara as an employee.

He was apparently able to memorize necessary techniques from textbooks and worked on three cardinal rules. First of all, expand into the vacuum—in every situation find some task that no one wants to do and then do it with a passion. Secondly, when accused of being an impostor, the burden of proof rest solely on the accuser. And, thirdly, when in danger, attack.

As Robert Crichton was writing his award-winning 1959 biography and exposé of Fred, he asked him what motivated his odd behavior. Fred claimed that he just wanted to belong, to be a part. He also acknowledged that he could never quite bring himself to doing everything necessary to actually achieve something for real. It was far easier to live the life of an impostor. And, he described his own motivation as "Rascality, pure rascality."

So, here was an impostor who—unlike the antichrist's of John's day who wanted to lead people astray from the fundamental truths of their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ—placed all his effort into assuming an identity in order to belong to something bigger than himself.

Truth be known, if Fred Demara had put that same effort into actually achieving a true identify of his own, he would have been far better off personally and would have likely helped an even greater number of people.

I am pleased to report to you that the saga of Fred's life did not end with the story that was made into a 1961 motion picture starring Tony Curtis. In fact, the publication of Crichton's book and the release of the movie, pretty much put an end to Fred's life as "The Great Impostor."

With his impostor's life over, Fred felt himself set adrift. He became a heavy drinker and tried just once more to assume another identity. But, he had become too famous to pull it off.

Left at the bottom of a bottle of booze, Fred finally decided to do something meaningful with his life. He stopped pretending. He responded to the Holy Spirit's knocking on the door of his heart. And, he surrendered his life to Christ.

In the years that stretched onward from the early 1960's until Fred died in 1982, he stopped being an impostor and finally became real.

Putting to use some of time he had spent reading the Bible and other theological literature when he pretended to be a monk, Fred earned a Graduate Certificate in Bible from Multnomah College of the Bible in Portland, Oregon. Armed with genuine credentials, Fred spent the rest of his life teaching people about God and the life-transforming power of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Asked about which life was better, Fred acknowledged that it was far better to be real than to be an impostor. "It's a lot easier to be Fred Demara," he said, "than to be someone else. Even when I was doing my best to help someone—even though I was making every effort to do something good—I could never quite escape the sense that I was totally on my own."

"Okay," you might respond. "Kind of a cute story, Dean, but what does it have to do with abiding in Christ? And, even more, what does it have to do with me?"

Just this: while I have absolutely no idea who you are, I know enough about human nature and enough about the realities of daily life to know it is possible that sitting right here with us today are some impostors. Now, please do not react with offense at that label. I am not accusing you of deliberately being "antichrist." Far from it. I think you are, in many cases, trying as hard as you can to live a life that you would describe as "Christian."

In fact, I think you are trying so hard to be a Christian that you feel exhausted by the effort.

I also have a strong sense that some of you find yourself wondering, quite often, whether or not you really are a Christian. Is all of this business about belonging to Christ, remaining in Christ, abiding in Christ real? Or, is it all just a fairy tale that some folks have made up to help them get through the day?

If what I have described resonates with you, the anointing that John talks about in this passage of Scripture is the element that may be missing from your life.

In a sentence, what I've been trying to share with you this morning might go something like this: "The Holy Spirit transforms impostors and makes them real, so they can truly abide in Christ." Let me say that again. "The Holy Spirit transforms impostors and makes them real, so they can truly abide in Christ."

Are you tired of working so hard to be a Christian? Do you have doubts as to whether or not you belong to Christ? When I suggest that there may well be impostors among us, do you feel a little twinge within the core of your being?

Well, maybe, just maybe, that's the Holy Spirit knocking on the door of your heart. And, maybe its time that you said, "Yes" to Him.

As the world judges things, I have very little to commend me. But do you know what? I'm real. I'm not an impostor. Since that day nearly 51 years ago when I responded to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and bowed my knee in fealty to the Great King, Jesus, I have belonged to Him.

Oh, yes. I have failed Him and disappointed Him over and over again. But, He has never failed me. I have never doubted that I belong to Him. You know how I know? The same way you can know: through the testimony of the anointing power and presence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, that lives within me.

Right now, in the quietness of this sanctuary—this place where you have "come apart" from the slings and arrows of the world—right now you, too, can know for certain that Christ lives within you by the power of the Holy Spirit. You can receive His anointing. You can stop trying so hard to be a Christian and let Christ live in and through you. You can stop being an "impostor" and become real.

Just in case my words do strike a chord with someone here today who is feeling the Holy Spirit knocking on the door of his or her heart, I am going to ask you to turn with me to the bottom of the second page of the bulletin. I have printed a prayer there to help you take the next step in your spiritual journey. If you are one who wants to respond to that knocking of the Holy Spirit, please pray silently with me, as I read this prayer aloud. Okay?

"Because I sense Your Holy Spirit speaking to me in this moment, I bow my heart before You, O God. You have chosen to make me aware of Your Presence and I'm sensing that You truly care about me.

"I want to settle this matter that has hung over me for some time. Here and now, I acknowledge that You are who You say You are, and that You have done for me what You say You have done.

"I no longer wish to rely on my own efforts to win Your favor. Please respond to my surrender by filling me with the transforming power of Your Holy Spirit.

"From now on, I will allow Your Spirit to enable me to love You and serve You with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love my neighbor as I love myself.

"Thank You for hearing me, as I pray in and through the Name of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

If you sincerely prayed that prayer with me today, you will begin to have a new sense of Christ's Presence within you. Now, when you sense a knocking at your heart's door, it will come from within, not

from without. And, when the Holy Spirit prompts you to do something or say something on behalf of Christ, you will have a greater power to accomplish whatever task He gives you. Most importantly of all, when the evil one tries to tempt you into doubting whether or not you belong to Christ, the Holy Spirit within you will give you a calm assurance that you are, indeed, a citizen of Christ's Kingdom.

Do you remember the chorus of the old gospel song that I shared with you the last time I spoke, on February 3rd? It still applies today, especially today:

"Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me. Not for the years of time alone, but for eternity."

Again, what I've tried in my poor way to share with you today: "The Holy Spirit transforms impostors and makes them real, so they can truly abide in Christ." Amen.