

I John 1:5-7          Second Baptist Church – Communion  
Third Sunday of Advent  
Seeing the Unseen Christ - March 7, 2010

Back from the Brink <sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. <sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all<sup>[a]</sup> sin.

The date was 1962, and a young president, John F. Kennedy, just 44 years old, sits at the desk in the briefing room. The decision he has to make is to deploy military force against the greatest superpower rival on earth. The crisis he faces is one of immense proportion. The photos he is studying were taken from a U2 reconnaissance aircraft. One picture in particular revealed that the Soviets had placed medium-ranged missile silos in Cuba. These missiles were capable of reaching the strategic targets in the U.S.

The risk of world conflict had not reached this level since WWII. It involved the two greatest superpowers in the world. The president acted decisively, ordering Premier Khrushchev to halt all further deliveries of weapons and to immediately dismantle the missile sites. A broadcast to the American people let us know the gravity of the situation. The president said, “The secret, swift, extraordinary buildup of communist weapons is a deliberate and unjustifiable challenge to our national security, and it will not be accepted.” We braced our hearts for what was to come. President Kennedy ordered an immediate naval and air blockade of Cuba. Khrushchev decided he would test this young president’s resolve. He would challenge the fabric of America. He would confront the standard of our convictions. The Soviet ships sailed on toward Cuba.

The world held its breath in nervous anticipation as hours crept by and ships grew closer to one another. Remember that game of chicken you used to play as kids? You wanted to see who would flinch when challenged? In international politics, you call it “brinkmanship”. Brinkmanship is defined as “the practice of pushing a dangerous situation to the verge of disaster in order to achieve the most advantageous outcome”. It is the willingness to expose oneself to risk, to press the limits of safety for a cause. The Soviets were going

to press the boundary, walk the line, and see just how much they could get away with.

The Soviet ships were 100 yards from our American ships. Our navy was on full battle alert with orders to stop the Russians at all costs. While this all happened before my earliest memories on in life (I was only 2), I can certainly see how intense this situation was for the nation.

This incident in world history was a parallel to our daily lives. Many people today are involved in a dangerous game of spiritual brinkmanship. We walk the very boundary of sin in our lifestyle. Balancing precariously, we move toward the cliff's edge. Dangling our toes over the abyss, we tempt the fall. We struggle and play around with bad habits that become self-destructive patterns. At the same time, we say, "Oh, don't worry about me, I'm a Christian. Jesus will protect me."

It is like the comedian Fred Allen once said, "Some Christians spend the first six days of the week sowing their wild oats and then they go to church on Sunday and pray for crop failure." There is a myth that says we can live comfortably in our world of faith and then flirt with the world. But God calls us to a better standard. Throughout scripture and in various ways, God says, "Be holy as I am holy." For those who want to live on the edge and practice this spiritual brinkmanship, First John has something to say to us. Let's look at verses 5-7: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. <sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all<sup>[a]</sup> sin.

Like our theme today of "Reversing a self-destructive habit", this passage suggests that there is a huge difference between walking in darkness and walking in light. We are called to walk in the light, leaving the darkness behind. It suggests that we don't play with the devil. It suggests that we be holy and righteous before God. See, there is something very valuable and precious that is capable and sufficient in removing the curse of sin. THE BLOOD OF JESUS. Robert Lowry wrote a hymn in the 1800s that says it all. "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus; What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

Each time we come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are essentially celebrating our own redemption. We are celebrating freedom from that which

destroys. We are trusting that the God who saved us can continue to free us from self-destructive habits.

We are also saying that we aren't going to walk on the brink anymore. We aren't going to dangle our toes over the cliff and hope we don't fall. This morning as we come to the table, remember that because of Christ, we have power over sin. While it is true that "nobody is perfect.", using that as our mantra and our excuse for continuing self-destructive behavior is not what God has in mind when he says, "Be holy as I am holy."

On the bulletin insert, there are some ways to combat sinful and destructive behaviors. Most of it involves talking to God about it. It is through the power of God that we overcome sin. May God help you in your daily walk with him and as you become victorious over that which destroys.

### **Bulletin Insert**

## **Embrace Righteousness and Renounce Evil: Reverse Self-destructive Behavior**

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering. I Peter 5:8-9*

Every Christian struggles with his or her own self-destructive behaviors. It is very easy to think that our sin is not as bad as someone else's sin. The self-righteous believer can condemn someone else for violence or pornography, while at the same time they are destroying others with gossip and anger. It is important that we each look at our own sin and take careful inventory as to how it is affecting our walk with Christ.

During times of genuine revival in the church, when the presence of the risen Christ is experienced in unusual fashion, people come under intense conviction and find relief only as they confess their sins.

The action step for this week is: **IDENTIFY SINS IN YOUR LIFE THAT HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST AND OTHERS.**

When those sins have been identified, here are some steps to overcoming them:

- **PRAY** for God's strength in overcoming this self-destructive behavior.

- **MONITOR** your behavior and progress in overcoming this behavior in the coming weeks.
- **CONFESS** your sin to a close friend whom you can trust. Be accountable to this person by sharing your success and failures with this person.
- **THANK** God for your victories over this sin.