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If you read both closely, 2 John appears to be an outline for 1 John. Opposition and division about Jesus and the content of John's message had spread from one church to many of the churches under the elder's leadership. Some folks in the community had too low a view of Jesus that saw only his humanity while others had too high a view and saw his divinity but denied he was a real man. Another group who were seen as opponents in the letter had once embraced John's teaching and been part of the community but they had clashed with others in the church over belief and behavior. It became impossible for them to remain in the community bearing John's name and they left. 2 John reveals that the divisions in the faith community had deepened and that more people had left, those who did not confess or believe that Jesus had come in the flesh as a human being (2 John 7).¹ Divisions, arguments, disagreements over beliefs and behavior have been part of the history of the church from its earliest days.

2 John was probably written sometime between 80-95 when leadership problems were arising as the churches became older and the first generation of Christians who were eyewitnesses to Jesus were dying off. The letter was likely written to a leader in Asia Minor, somewhere around Ephesus. John the apostle could still be a living witness of the old commandment to love one another, but his churches now have new leaders, several of whom may be women. Churches usually met in homes and the egalitarian view of human beings in the Christian Way attracted influential women. They opened their homes to the church when they became Christians, and naturally they served in them.

2 John says that it is from the elder to "the elect lady and her children." Some commentators treat this as a metaphor for the congregation, but nowhere else in the New Testament do we find a congregation or faith community addressed in this way. It is possible that John has a specific lady in mind, a church leader with a congregation under her care. The term lady (kyria) is the feminine form of "lord" (kyrios), and since kyrios is a guardian, master of a house, or head of a family it is certainly possible that kyria is a female church leader and the children are the Christians in her care. In 2 John we hear many of the themes that are at the heart of John's Gospel, such as love, truth, abides, and joy.

¹ The IVP Women's Bible Commentary, edited by Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, (InterVarsity Press, Downer's Grove, IL 2002), 797-798.

Listen to 2 John:

“1 **The elder to the elect lady and her children,**

whom **I love in the truth**, and not only I but also all who know **the truth**, 2

because of **the truth** that **abides** in us and will be with us forever:

3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, in **truth and love**. 4

I was **overjoyed** to find some of your children **walking in the truth**, just as we have been commanded by the Father. 5 But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, **let us love one another**. 6 **And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning—you must walk in it.** 7 Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist! 8 Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward. 9 Everyone who does not **abide** in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever **abides** in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; 11 for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.

12 Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink; instead I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, **so that our joy may be complete.**

13 The children of your elect sister send you their greetings.”

I want to share with you this morning about **walking obediently**. John says, “I was **overjoyed** to find some of your children **walking in the truth**. **And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning—you must walk in it.”**

While we were in Maine on vacation last month, once my parents left we were responsible for taking care of their one-year-old Golden Lab named Cheyenne. Now when I was a boy growing up, our dog had one collar that you hooked a leash to when you took the dog out. With their latest dog though my parents have been, for the first time in my memory, to obedience school (that’s a school where dogs bring their owners to teach them how to act). So now my parents have three collars for the dog. They don’t use them all at once. There is what I’d call the regular one with a little metal circle to connect the leash, then one that looks kind of like a spiky chain thing that is supposed to

make the dog obey more readily when you pull on it and there is even a third scarier collar that involves the possibility of some electrical shock or something. The second two look like they are from a bad horror movie. I just used the old fashioned collar and the leash and I only had a few problems with the dog walking obediently. I just guided her where I wanted her to go and when she was full of energy and I would run with her for a hundred yards or so and she would calm down. I held the leash firmly enough that she knew who was in control; at least, that is what I told myself.

Anyone who has ever had a dog knows that it takes a while to train the dog to walk obediently. People are not much different in that regard. We also need to be trained to walk obediently. It is a fascinating thing when a baby begins to learn to walk. Babies are a lot of work, but at least most of the time you know where they are and you don't have to worry about them leaving a pretty small area. As children learn to walk it opens up a much wider world but you also get much more nervous because with their greater freedom comes a greater likelihood of falling or getting hurt or lost. By the time a young person is walking well enough that you don't have to worry anymore about if he or she is going to fall every ten steps or so, then you get more concerned about who they are walking with and where they are walking.

The metaphor of walking for living one's life is one of that is very common in the Bible. It is not just found in Psalm 101, and 1 and 2 John as we have heard in worship this morning. Proverbs is filled with advice about walking wisely and with integrity. For example,

Proverbs 12:28 *"In the path of righteousness there is life, **in walking its path** there is no death."*

10:9, *"Whoever **walks in integrity walks securely**, but whoever follows perverse ways will be found out."* Especially in this day and age of the Internet and the World Wide Web that ensnares many people not walking in integrity.

13:20 *"Whoever **walks with the wise** becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm."*

28:18 *"**One who walks in integrity will be safe**, but whoever follows crooked ways will fall into the Pit."*

The prophet Isaiah says (2:3-5), "Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways

and that we may walk in his paths.”

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob, come, **let us walk in the light of the Lord!**”

The Pharisees and scribes criticized Jesus asking in Mark 7:5,
*“Why do your disciples **not walk** according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”*

Paul writes in Romans 14:15, *“If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, **you are no longer walking in love**. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.”*

1 John 2:5-6 uses this image of walking as well.

“By this we may be sure that we are in him: 6 whoever says, “I abide in him,” ought to walk just as he walked.”

The path that Jesus walked was the path of self-giving love. There is an old singing group called The Four Freshman that some folks in our church like a lot. One of the songs that group sings says, *“In this whole wide world is there no one who loves me? In this whole wide world is there no one who cares?”*

God’s answer to that question is, *“I do.”* And as God’s people the main thing we are called to do is to incarnate, to embody God’s love in the world as Jesus did.

It is staggering to consider all the issues that people in this church are wrestling with today. Among our church family we have people with spouses and children who are dealing with addictions. Some are watching children grow up and head out to college and adulthood and wondering where the years went and what happens now. Others are coping with the death of family members and friends. The death of those closest to us strikes at our own mortality. The death of famous people like opera singer Luciano Pavarotti, who was known all over the world and impacted millions of people, can cause us to wonder what difference, what impact, our own little not-well known life has made. Some are dealing with serious illnesses, diseases, and surgery. Some of you are feeling

pressed for time because there isn't enough time to do everything you want and need to do with work and family and hobbies and friends. It is hard sorting out what to say "yes" to and what to say "no" to when there are so many options competing for our time.

One thing I know for a fact is that every person you see has burdens he or she is carrying around. Another thing I know for a fact is that the reason why the Bible tells us so frequently to love another and walk in the way of love is because we all need to know we are loved by God and by some family and friends.

Jill and I really enjoy walking we will walk for over an hour together and talk about life and what is going on, what we need to do, what is coming up. As we walk we sometimes come to intersections where we have to decide which way to go next. The prophet Jeremiah uses that image to talk about life.

Jeremiah 6:16 says,

"Thus **says** the Lord:

Stand at the crossroads, and **look**, and **ask** for the ancient paths where the good way lies; and **walk** in it, and find **rest** for your souls.

But they said, *'We will not walk in it.'*

Once we have looked and listened and received instruction and guidance then it is up to us to Take action, to take responsibility for the direction of our life. Jeremiah reminds us of our own responsibility for our fate.

He warned the people of his time and they refused to listen, they chose not to walk in God's path. They looked to blame their enemies, God, even the prophet himself, but not themselves. Unwilling to hear, they were heading toward catastrophe.

In our own lives there comes a moment when we need to get moving.

We need to start walking in the direction God has revealed to us.

Some of this walking and taking responsibility is part of growing up.

There has been a fair amount in the media about Mother Teresa and the release of much of her private writings that reveal she profoundly felt the absence of God's presence and God's voice in her life for a long, long time. It has been interesting to see how people have responded to that news. Some folks act amazed that someone like Mother Teresa could have struggled with her faith or feeling God's absence, while others can totally understand how a woman working so hard in such difficult conditions, witnessing overwhelming suffering and poverty day after day, year after year could end

up having a profound crisis of faith. What has touched me the most about it, however, is that Mother Teresa, no matter how she *felt*, she kept walking in the direction God revealed to her, she kept walking obediently in loving others no matter what.

There are many ways we all can walk obediently in love as Jesus did including through compassionate deeds, by forgiving others, through caring confrontation, being loyal, keeping a sense of humor, celebrating the small and large moments of life, being creative, honoring others, teaching others to care, and by really listening. These are things all of us can do throughout the week. Whatever faith struggles we may be having, whatever burdens we may be carrying, these ten ways of sharing and showing love can help us to keep walking even when we're lonely, tired or we feel like our well has run dry.

Earlier I mentioned the singing group the Four Freshman, no disrespect, but I would be more likely to have Fats Domino on my play list. Fats Domino had a song about walking. It's a love song called I'm Walking. If you listen to it at a different level, it is a song that God could be singing to you. The lyrics are:

I'm walkin' yes indeed I'm talkin' 'bout you and me

I'm hopin that you come back to me

I'm lonely As I can be

I'm waiting for your company

I'm hopin that you come back to me

What you gotta do when the well run dry

You gonna run away and hide

I'm gonna run right by your side

For you pretty baby I'd even cry...

I'm walkin' yes indeed I'm talkin'

'bout you and me I'm hopin

that you come back to me."

The great thing about love is that love is not limited like a blueberry pie that only serves a few people. I have to confess that nothing makes my sinful nature rise to the surface faster than the presence of a blueberry pie on a table – because I don't want to share it with anyone! It is a sin I may never be able to overcome. Unlike a blueberry pie that is limited and finite, love multiplies and grows the more we share it and the more we give it away as we walk obediently in the way of Jesus.