

Knowing Jesus Better: Testimony and Love

Covenant Church
Sunday, December 23, 2018
Zack Phillips, Pastor

1 John 1:1-4 (NRSV)

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

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1 Cor. 15:1-5 (NRSV) Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

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In his book *Testimony*, William Coady recounts the following story that was told to him by Australian scientist E. G. Bowen about his friend Brett Hilder. Hilder was a well-known sea-captain. Over some twenty years, he kept detailed records of 15-20 sightings of a strange “phosphorescent phenomenon” in the West Pacific. Each time Hilder witnessed long rays of light moving 10-20 feet below the surface of the ocean. He submitted a paper describing the phenomenon, in which he offered no real account of its cause, to several academic journals. It was “rejected out of hand... with no reasons given.” Coady and Bowen concluded that the rejection was due to the fact that the referees from the journals found that “its descriptions were ‘disanalogous’ with their experience.” Interestingly, years later, Bowen discovered two similar descriptions of the phenomenon, one in the diary of another sea-captain and one in a German oceanic journal.

Bowen’s response to Hilder is the most significant part of the story. Bowen revealed to Coady: “Frankly, I had great difficulty in accepting the story. But knowing the man, I had to believe that he had seen something and described it accurately.”¹

¹ C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 190

Reflection for this Fourth Sunday in Advent

The Word of God, therefore, God, the Son of God, Who in the beginning was with God, by Whom all things are made, and without Whom was made nothing that was made, became Man, that He might free man from eternal death; bending down to the taking of our lowliness, without diminution of His own Majesty, so that remaining what He was, and taking upon Himself what He was not, He might join the form of a true servant to that form in which He is equal to God the Father...;

—St. Leo, Sermon on “The Mystery of the Divinity”²

² As translated in *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*. Translated and edited by M. F. Toal. 4 vols. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996. Vol. 1, p. 119.