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Narrative Lectionary 4.42 – 1 John 01/04
I John 1.1-4

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“Hang In There”

She was depressed.

And what she was depressed most about was that she was once again depressed.

Her thoughts drifted back to those days just 4 months earlier
when she had been riding the crest of the wave.

How could things that had been so amazingly wonderful gone so wrong?

How was it that she had gone from apathy to joy and then back to depression
in the space of a few short months?

When her heart had been broken all those many years ago,
she had made sure she could never be hurt again.

She had built a fortress around her heart so that no one, *no one*, could ever get in.

And the fortress had worked.

It had protected her from being hurt again and she had been grateful.

What she had only half-realized was that there was a downside to locking yourself away –
you ended up like sleeping beauty in the castle:

you weren't exactly dead, but you might as well be,

since all the love and desire and passion and joy that had once lived in your heart
had withered and died.

And then came that wonderful day

when God had given someone the key to that impenetrable fortress around her heart,
and he had come in, her very own Prince Charming,
awakened her with a kiss, and brought her back to life.

She had fallen in love and it was the best feeling in the entire world.

It was truly like being resurrected from the dead.

She had never ever felt so good.

Her heart was so filled with love and joy and gratitude she thought it would burst.

And the excitement and enthusiasm radiated from her with the energy of the sun.

And then, somehow, she had messed things up.

She had hurt him and no matter how much she had tried to make things right, she couldn't.

He couldn't forget. He couldn't forgive. He would never trust her again.

It was over.

Her heart had been broken all over again.

And all she wanted to do was to retreat into her fortress,
and go back to being in that safe, pale world of apathy.

Of course she knew what that meant.

She knew in her heart that Energy=God=Love=Life=Light (=Energy=God...and so on and so on...).

Taking Love out of any equation means you also take out Energy and God and Life and Light.

And you go back to depression & despair & darkness and feeling as though you might as well be dead.

But since she couldn't fix the relationship, all that was left was to give up and leave it behind.

The First Letter of John was written in Ephesus around the year 100.
It's a pastoral letter intended to encourage and instruct the congregations in Asia Minor,
seven of which are named in the Book of Revelation.
William Barclay explains the context of the letter this way:

“Many (of John’s readers) were now second or even third generation Christians.
The thrill of the first days had, to some extent, at least, passed away. ...
In the first days of Christianity there was a glory and a splendour,
but now Christianity had become a thing of habit, ‘traditional, half-hearted, nominal.’ ...
John was writing at a time when, for some at least,
the first thrill was gone and the flame of devotion had died to a flicker.”
(The Letters of John and Jude, Daily Bible Study Series, p. 3)

When they had first opened their hearts to Christ,
they had been so filled with love and joy and gratitude
that they thought their hearts would burst.
And the excitement and enthusiasm had radiated from their community
with the energy of the sun.

And then, somehow, things had gotten messed up.
There had been disagreements and conflict and hateful words had been spoken
and no matter how hard they had tried to make things right, they couldn't.
And so, in their hurt and pain, they had locked away their hearts
and retreated back into a safe, pale world of apathy,
where the love and joy they had once felt had withered and died.

Of course the writer of 1 John knew what that meant.
Energy = God = Love = Life = Light (= Energy = God = Love = Life = Light,
and so on and so on...)
Taking Love out of any equation means you also take out Energy and God and Life and Light.
And you go back to being, for all intents and purposes, dead.

So how does an individual or a community recover their joy?

For the writer of 1 John, it has to do,
not so much with the Word of God which created life in the beginning,
but with the Word of God embodied in Jesus – Jesus who was the very embodiment of Love,
a love that created “koinonia” or community
between God and people, and among people themselves.

One of the most powerful presentations I ever heard was from M. Scott Peck
who spoke about the difference between the pseudo community that is found in most congregations
and the genuine community to which the Church is called.

Pseudo community is the kind that glosses over differences, that pretends that we are all the same,
that values agreement over diversity of opinion,
that believes that unity is achieved when dissenters leave.

Like a building that has received attentive cosmetic repairs,
a pseudo community may look perfectly fine at first;
but look closer, and underneath the shiny new paint, you will find cracks in the foundation.

Whenever Peck was brought in to empower an organization,
he began by undertaking a very painful process --
by moving beyond the similarities to the differences,
and beyond the agreements to the disagreements,
exposing every crack,
until any unity that the organization had thought it had, was utterly shattered,
and everyone (including Peck himself) was entirely without hope.

And then in the midst of a hell of hopelessness, he would ask them to be silent and wait.
And they would wait. And wait. And wait.

And then, Peck said, eventually something amazing would happen –
the thing which we Christians call the Spirit would begin her work of healing the brokenness
and transforming the fragile pseudo community into a genuine community,
strong enough to contain all the diversity, differences, and disagreements of its members.

The real key, it seems, is that you can't give up.

As saints and sinners, it is inevitable that we are going to hurt each other. It's only a matter of time.

But being hurt is actually a good sign,
because it means that you have gone beneath the skin to the heart.

Yes, it hurts, but the answer is not to encase our hearts in fortresses,
the answer is not to build walls to keep others at a distance,
the answer is not to give up on broken relationships.

The answer is to keep on listening, to keep on loving, and to keep on living in the faith
that God is still at work.

The answer is to hang in there, waiting and trusting that God can and will heal the brokenness.

1 John recalls for us what it was like back when our hearts were full of love and joy
and reminds us that the one who poured that joy into our hearts in the first place is God,
a God who is Love and Life and Light and Energy,
a God who is both powerful and loving enough to heal any relationship, no matter how broken.

Whether the relationship is superficial, or broken, or healthy, the truth is this:

God is there,
and where there is God there is Energy and Light and Life and Love.

Thanks be to God! **Amen**