

“A Strange Introduction to the Familiar”
 Acts 5:27-32; Revelation 1:4-8
 Rev. David Hutchinson
 Sunday, April 28, 2019

Would you be disappointed to hear - - that this morning’s scripture reading - -
 - - is JUST an introduction?

“Just an introduction” - - seems a fitting way to describe - - an introduction.

My experience with introductory OFFERS is - - they are never quite honest.

The 4 dollar a week New York Times soon becomes \$40.

Introductions of politicians on TV - - tell only the good stuff.

Introductions can sometimes seem insignificant. / For example the movie credits that roll at the beginning of a movie are partly a way of saying - - we haven’t really gotten started yet - - you haven’t missed anything important... It’s still OK to get popcorn.

When I call the bank for information on a particular transaction - - or any place with a phone tree of choices - - I almost NEVER really LISTEN carefully - - even though I know the MENU options have changed. / I want to skip through the introduction as quickly as possible.

The directions on a Macaroni and Cheese box - - which INTRODUCE you to how to make Kraft Mac and cheese - - usually get thrown out - - unread. / Unless you’ve NEVER made it before - - you don’t really need an introduction to this process.

However - - the insignificance of introductory material is NOT ALWAYS true...

Introductions of PEOPLE - - CAN be significant.

First impressions are important.

BUT - - they usually take on a kind of standard format:

For example...

Hello, how are you?

I'm fine and you?

Oh fine, this is so and so - - or my name is David.

Oh, nice to meet you.

It's a pretty recognizable format.

It's an introduction.

There are lots of standard formats in life.

Voicemail greetings for another example:

"Hi, this is so and so - - I can't take your call right now - - leave a message at the sound of the tone - - and I'll get back to you."

You don't really even need to listen - - just wait for the beep.

So then - - it's notable - - when someone ALTERS the standard format a bit.

I've heard these:

"By now you should know how this works. The beep is coming next."

OR - - "You've reached the home of Rev. Davidson. Leave a message at the sound of the beep and I'll get back to you - - - God willing."

OR - - "You've got my number - - but you haven't got ME"

What makes these last few amusing is that we know the STANDARD.

We know how it's SUPPOSED to go - - and then we hear an alteration.

Well - - LETTERS in the BIBLE - - are usually introduced - using a standard format. / The letters of Paul - - recorded in the New Testament - - all begin in a similar way. / Usually in three parts:

1. It's me Paul, an apostle or whatever whatever....
2. To the church in wherever blah blah blah
3. Grace to you and peace

Look up 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians...

They all begin in this very similar recognizable way:

“It's me Paul - - to the church in wherever - - grace and peace to you”

Usually in two or three verses.

It's a standard format - - introduction.

BUT - - the book of Revelation is DIFFERENT.

AND - - YET - - it's SIMILAR.

The introduction to the book of Revelation is - - STRANGE.

Because it uses the standard format - - but ALTERS it.

Revelation starts out like a letter - - in the standard format - - but ADDS stuff.

It's not JUST an introduction - - it's *already* a report of a vision.

It's like John - - who is said to have written it - - just couldn't wait!

It goes like this:

“From John - - to the seven churches that are in Asia - - Grace to you and
Peace - - so far so good - - BUT THEN he adds “another FROM and TO”

“FROM - - him who is and was and is to come - -

FROM the seven spirits who are before his throne...

FROM Jesus Christ the faithful witness and firstborn of the dead...

TO - - Him who loves us and freed us from our sins - - and made us a Kingdom - -

BEHOLD - - he is coming in the clouds - - and every eye shall see him!”

Pheew.

And only THEN - - does John go back and begin the body of the letter.

It's like there is a MESSAGE - - IN - - the introduction.

It reminds me of an answering machine I once heard.

I called up and heard this on the machine:

“Hello Jim, this is Carla - - and the car's broken down in the driveway - - and I called the mechanic - - so I guess I'll see you at six - - but you'll have to get a ride home - - and if you could pick up a gallon of milk that would be great.”

Beep

It was not a PRELUDE to a MESSAGE - -

- - it WAS the message.

I guess Jim didn't have a cell phone Carla could call - - so she just converted her introduction - - into a message for him.

That's sort of like what happens in the book of Revelation.

John is - - FAMILIAR - - with GOD.

He's not just going to introduce a letter - - he's going to introduce - - GOD.

This is going to be MORE than a letter.

It is a report of a VISION of God - - in the form of a letter.

It starts out in a very FAMILIAR way.

But it goes in a completely different direction - - than we expect.

So let's get a little background - - to help understand this better.

John - - who wrote Revelation - - or the “Revelation to John” - - was in PRISON.

His faith - - has caused him to come into conflict with some powerful people.

John has - - walked his talk - - when it comes to faith.

Can you imagine what it would be like - - to be put in prison for your faith?

So - - John may be strange.

And his introduction to this letter may be strange...

But John is trying to get us to see that for all that strange-ness - - HE is
FAMILIAR with God - - and we can believe what he says about God.

He has walked the walk.

John reminds me of a man who once INTRODUCED himself to ME.

We were attending the same event and I was sitting next to him. / He jumped
right in and said: "Hello young fella - - I'm an old man you know - - I'm going on 85
years old - - name's George."

I wasn't sure how to respond, so I said:

"Well Hi George, I'm David, and I guess it's all about how young you feel in your heart"

"Naaah - - he said, 'It's about how you feel in your knees and your back!'"

Obviously George - - was more experienced than I was.

He had walked the walk - - of life.

And his introduction - - to me - - made that clear.

And I thought about it for a while - - and there was something there.

I hadn't lived in a wheelchair - - or gotten arthritis - - or lived through the war...

So - - how does a person - - communicate - - there experience?

To someone who has never - - experienced it?

That's what John is trying to do.

John had a vision from God - - in prison - - about the triumph of good over evil.

This book - - is his attempt to share that - - with us.

A revelation.

It's fantastic stuff - - just keep reading.

Thunder - - fire and smoke - - beasts and dragons.

BUT - - it is NOT JUST - - about those things.

Revelation is a book of GREAT HOPE.

Written by a man who - - lived his faith - - and put his life on the line.

And the heart of the vision is a MEEK little LAMB...

Who TRIUMPHS - - OVER - - all the world's evil and power.

Yes there are BOTH - - good AND evil in the world.

BUT - - GOOD wins.

That's what John's vision is all about.

John is not only familiar with GOD - -

But GOD - - is familiar with US.

In spite of all the - - strange and the fantastic.

John knows God - - AND John knows PEOPLE too.

He knows about these SEVEN churches to whom he writes this.

He knows their good and bad points.

He knows their weaknesses - -

Their ups and downs...

John knows the people in these churches WELL ENOUGH - - to have things
AGAINST them! / TO have had his own disagreements with them.

John is familiar with TWO things - - it turns out:

John is familiar with BOTH - -

The ways of God - - REVEALED to him.

AND - - the ways of PEOPLE - - who he knows.

He is familiar with God and with US.

He knows the BEASTS and DRAGONS - - in us.

AND he has HOPE - - nevertheless - - because he ALSO knows God.

Do we doubt him?

We know about school shootings - - and terrorist threats - - and failures.

And we know that those things out there - -

can cause the end of the world - - right here - - in our minds and hearts.

As we consider this - - I'll close with a story of another introduction.

Mark Twain once introduced Winston Churchill.

It was 1900 - - after a war effort on the part of England.

Mark Twain said this:

“Although I think England sinned by getting into war against South Africa - - I also think we in America sinned by the war in the Philippines.”

“Mr. Churchill will tell you about the war in South Africa - - and he is qualified because he fought there. / By his father he is English, and by his mother he is American.

We are now on the most pleasant terms with England.

BUT - - we have always been kin.

Kin in blood, kin in religion, kin in ideals, just and lofty purposes...

And now with this war - - we are also - - kin in SIN.

Kin in sin - the harmony is complete - - I present to you: Mr. Winston Churchill”

Sometimes it takes someone who knows us - - to show us something.

To recognize the faults.

John knows the faults of these churches.

But - - so did God.

God knows us.

That's the point of the CROSS.

And the good news is - - God also LOVES us.

There is HOPE.

John wrote from PRISON.

And it was a vision of hope.

God knows us - - completely.

AND - - nevertheless - - we can still know God.

Amen.