

WHO WE ARE

April 15, 2018
Lutheran Church of the Cross
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Our text is from 1 John chapter 3:

¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 Jn. 3:1-3 ESV)

There is a question that we ask ourselves throughout our lives. When you are little, it is asked as, “What do I want to be when you grow up?” When you are a little older, it is asked as, “What college do I want to attend? What major area of study do I want to pursue?” When you get much older, it can become, “What career change do I want to make?” Or it can be asked, “What do I want to do in retirement?” Or finally, it can be asked, “What do I do now that I can no longer... (fill in the blank)?” We are always somewhere right now. And we are always on a journey between where we are now and where we want to be someday.

Who am I now? Where will I be then? Our reading gives us an answer—God’s answer. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.” This statement is given by John with a tone of amazement. In the gospel of John, there is only one who is called God’s Son—Jesus. Only one. Christians are always and ever called his children. Or called his little children. This is amazing and startling for John to say.

But there are other hints of amazement and emphasis. John does not simply say, “See what love the Father has given,” but rather “See what KIND of love.” He does not just surprisingly say that we are children, but he repeats himself and says, “and so we are!”

John writes with such amazement because he believes in a type of family resemblance. We use expressions such as “Like father, like son” and “The apple does not fall from the tree.” John actually believes it. To be the son of the Father means:

- You are the spitting image of the Father.
- You are the living, breathing representation of the dying and rising image of the Father, in whom there is no darkness at all; there is only light. In whom there is always and only the powerful dying and rising and living love.
- There is only one Son of the Father by right and by deed from beginning to end. There is only one Jesus who gave Himself for all. There is only one Jesus who lives and intercedes for all. Jesus is a son...THE Son.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God, and so we are.” It shouldn’t actually be true, of course. And it was not easy to make it happen. John uses words to describe things with which we are familiar but most of us do not understand. He tells us in both Gospel and letter that we actually had to be reborn. He tells us that we were walking in darkness and had to be brought into the light. He tells us that we were living a lie and we had to be brought into the truth. After all, if we were foolish enough to say we have no sin, we would be deceiving ourselves and the truth would not be in us.

But see what sort of love the Father has given us. Because of the promises given when the baptismal water came down on you, and because of the promises that we see and hear and believe in word and sacrament, we get to be the children of God. We get to be the children of God because of the Son of God. Surprisingly and incredibly, that is who we ARE.

John begins verse two by repeating himself: we are God's children now. So, what do you want to be when you grow up? Where do you want to be this summer? What kind of retirement do you wish to have? What do you do now that you no longer can...(fill in the blank)? There are lots of specifics that no one knows—not me or career counselors or doctors or hospice personnel. But God knows. He is telling us: beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as he is. This is God’s answer to the question.

Today, if you believe it, it will be your answer to the question, too. You will be like Jesus. As He is love, so you will be love. As He is pure, so you will be pure. As He loves and does righteousness, so you will do love and righteousness. As He has loved us, so you will love one another. When He appears, you will be like Him. It will be enough on that day to see Jesus as He is. That will change you. We will be what Jesus wants us to be—children of God who are like the Son of God.

I invite you then by faith to answer this question with me: What do you want to be when you grow up? The answer is, “I want to be like Jesus.” Now, surprisingly, you are the children of God. Then, amazingly, you will be like Jesus in a way that will make you a joy and a privilege to be around and live with forever.

Until then, purify yourself. When you see sin in your life; when you see darkness in your life; when you see something that looks like someone who is the child of the devil, then purify yourself. Turn away from it. If it’s anger, if it’s apathy, if it’s self-centeredness, if it is contempt for a brother or a sister, purify yourself. Give that over to the cleansing blood of Jesus. Turn away from the darkness and turn to the light. Do not make a practice of sinning. Interrupt the practice. It is called repentance. Interrupt the practice and live the new life that is in you.

Little children, you are NOW the children of God. Honor one another. Give yourselves to one another so that we may be a community that radiates light and draws other people to the light. Do that because of what you will one day be. Don’t abide in sin. Abide in Christ. NOW we are the children of God. When Christ appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as he is.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.