

Sermon for the Third Sunday of Easter, April 19th, 2015

1 John 3:1-7

Blessings to you and peace from God the Father, our **risen** Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

For the **first** six weeks after Easter our second reading of the day is from the book of 1st John. I have **decided** to preach from these readings for the next **few** weeks so we can get a **feel** for this book and the **beauty** which it holds for us especially during the post-Easter season.

This book is attributed to the **same** John who wrote the gospel of John primarily because the style, diction, and content are so **closely** associated with John's gospel. **That** being said, you may remember that **last** week the reading from 1st John told us about Jesus being **revealed** after his resurrection and how the **fellowship** of the disciples was continued with the Father and Jesus Christ because of this. About how Jesus is the light and in him there is no darkness at all, how the **blood** of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, and how Jesus is an **advocate** for us when we **do** sin because of the atonement sacrifice He made for us—and not **only** us—but for the **whole** world.

Today our reading speaks of the love that God has for us, how we are **called** His children, of the hope we have in God, revealing sin as lawlessness, and how those who do right are righteous **just** as Jesus is righteous.

You may remember that Jesus was misunderstood by nearly **everyone** around him, and we Christians can often times expect the same type of behavior. This is not a very happy thought for those of us who **so** much want to fit in and be **accepted** by those around us. It is as if we face a choice of how to be in this world. Either we enjoy the love and accolades of the world **or** we let our lives be claimed by the love of God. If the **love** of God rules our lives and makes us into the children of God, then we might **expect** that **some** people today will have a hard time understanding our values and our **contrary** sense of identity.

In a culture of individualism, we belong to a community—the **body** of Christ. In an age that seeks **security** through any number of addictions or misguided behaviors, **we** seek solidarity, forgiveness, and peace. In a society that finds **personal identity** through social networking, **we** find the truth of who we are in our baptism and in following Christ's example. When we feel **right** at home here in the world we might wonder if we have **traded** the blissfulness of divine joy for the **comfort** of the temporal world which will one day pass away.

The **source** of our oddness—*if you will*—is the love of God that makes us into God’s children. **Knowing** that we are loved by such a love, we confess it, we consent to it, we agree to be set apart, to enter into a process of **transformation** that uproots us from our worldly identity. It fundamentally **changes** our way of life. Our birth certificate declares our **natural identity**. Our baptismal certificate declares our **true identity** as children of God. Through the sacrament of baptism we are loved, claimed, and redefined as God’s beloved children. By **knowing** the **love** God has for us we have a sense of hope and direction.

By sheer love, we are adopted out of the **vastness** of this world into the **family** of God. We still live here, *of course*, we still do what is necessary for daily life. But **unlike** those who do not know God, our heart’s **true** home is in a different time and in a different place. **That** is why we can be so easily misunderstood.

The love of God, John tells us, makes us nothing less than the **beloved** children of God. Of course, we do not always **act** or **think** that way. But we are God’s children, *none the less*, because God has claimed us to be in **relationship** with Him. This is a truth that is open to all. We do **not** exist in a closed ‘*club*’ or ‘*circle*’. We know God’s **love** is available for all people.

For now, we live in a **social** world, characterized by many faults, sins, and behaviors that are contrary to the way God originally **planned** this world to be. And *not only that*, our **own** lives are often times twisted and tangled by a combination of our **own** sin and the effects of the **sins** of others. Martin Luther said that we are simultaneously sinners and saints. *Never mind* that we do not yet appear to be God's children **because** of sin. *Never mind* that we have more changes to undergo. *Never mind* that we are, *as yet*, broken and incomplete, **yearning** for a peace and a holiness that we do not **yet** possess. In a deeper sense, we **do not** understand what **all** this means because we live with a double identity—the **old** identity of this world and the **new** identity which will transform us when **Jesus appears**. When **He** comes, the truth of who we are will become visible, radiating outward with the **truth** of God. This in-between time—the **old** and the **new**—can be bewildering making us **unsure** of ourselves not knowing which way to turn. *Just who are we as God's beloved children and how do we act? What does that mean for us here and now?*

We look at ourselves, we search our souls. When we look into our hearts with honesty and self-searching we may say, "*Am I child of God? Not me. I know what I do, I know what I think, I know who I am.*" Our sinful nature is something which we **cannot** deny.

But here is another truth that we are met with, being a child of God is **not** grounded in the experience of our **own** brokenness but this truth rests on the **promise** of God's love. It is a truth impossible to believe apart from the **gift** of faith. The truth that God's love has staked a claim on us **overpowers** the truths that we think we know from our experiences. We experience that brokenness that I was just talking about **but** God's **truth** declares us whole. We experience the lingering grip of sin that I was just talking about **but** God's **truth** declares us holy. We experience impurity **but** God is purifying us.

Like **most** people in our world we trust what we can see more than that which we cannot encounter with our senses. We **believe** the facts of **who** we are **more** than we trust the saving promises God has made us. **God's** truth is a deeper truth, a **final** truth, a truth not of what is now but of what shall be. It is the truth of grace that is greater than our sinful nature.

So when we look into our hearts and **ask** the question, "*Am I child of God? Not me.*" We want to instead learn to utter the **deeper** truth. "*Not yet complete, but 'YES' by God's grace I am one of God's own. Not yet fully visible, but already claimed. Not yet finished, but already begun.*"

For **now**, we are purified by hope. In that hope we **cling** to the truth of what God is doing **in** us. In this hope we yearn for those around us who do not yet

understand us, that by our **witness** of love, they too may at last come to say, “*I see the love that God has, I also want to become known as a child of God.*” To **God** be the glory forever and ever. **AMEN**