

11-3-19 SERMON CCI I John 3: 1-3 Now We Are Children of God- What Will We Be

One of the interesting things about being parents is seeing how much our children look and act like us. Just as we can look in the mirror and see our parents looking back at us, we can look at our kids and see ourselves. I remember seeing our daughter Laura playing house hearing her scold her dolls because apparently they had been bad, and recognizing my own voice in hers. And I wondered, "Is that how I sound?" Although they have their own personalities, our kids do resemble us in many ways Like this son imitating his father playing the guitar. One of the more famous American father-child resemblances was President John F. Kennedy and John and Caroline. Do we remember this famous picture of President Kennedy and his kids in the Oval Office? There they were, the son and daughter of the most powerful man in the nation, and they're just playing around like normal kids. It wasn't long before we saw little John strongly bear the resemblance of being a Kennedy as he saluted his father's body at his father's funeral procession after he had been assassinated. And as adults, John and Caroline followed their father's footsteps into public service, knowing they bore his name and were to act in the resemblance of their revered father. In our scripture reading from I John, the pastor John talks to us as children of God and asks us to consider, how well do resemble our heavenly Father?

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" The phrase "how great" is from Greek word that means "from what country." God's love is so much larger and so different from human love that in essence, Pastor John is asking, "What planet does this love come from? Certainly not earth." Romans 5: 8 tells us: *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* We struggle to understand that kind of unconditional love. Human love tends to be conditional: We tend to love those who love us back and haven't irritated us too much. Human love is more like a term we hear everyday on the news- quid pro quo. "I will love you if you ..." And when the other person doesn't do what we expect, we withhold our love. But God's love says "I love you in spite of the way you are." In spite of our being sinners, God loved us enough that Jesus died for us. That's how great God's love is.

So how did we become children of God? A few verses later in I John 5:1, John writes, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." We are born children of our parents at our physical birth. But we are born again as children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. We begin a new life in Christ by faith. It's a life spent learning how to resemble God in our character and how we live. We don't have to hope at the end of life that we've been good enough to **become** God's children, we **are** God's children by faith.

"The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him." As God's children trying to resemble our Father, others may not know what to do with us. How many of us have talked about God and his love with someone only to watch them step back away from us and say they're not interested in any of that religious mumbo jumbo? Or at work maybe we stood up against a coworker using racial slur and suddenly we were looked at as odd. John says don't be offended or alarmed; the world didn't know Jesus when he came and it doesn't understand his followers now. Many people who drive by our church street sign, imagine us as a nice group of religious people, gathered on a Sunday morning, singing sweet religious songs, but

just plain out of touch with the real world. Others imagine a group of deluded fanatics who believe things that aren't be true and may even get angry when we talk about what we believe. But either way, we should not be surprised or alarmed or bothered, and we should not give up sharing our faith. The world was wrong about Jesus and they're wrong about us too. Their wrongness does not cancel the reality that we are children of God. We've been declared so by God himself.

Vs 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

So **now** here on earth, we are children of God, created to live our lives giving God glory in all we do, reflecting God's character. But what about after this life? Have you ever wondered what all the believers who have died before us are doing in eternity right now? Mark Twain wrote a parody of what Christians of his day believed about heaven called *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*. Mark Twain described people flying around playing harps, which sounds good, except it's horrible because they never took any harp lessons. Duane, imagine if the Issaquah symphony this next season were all fill-ins with people who had never played an instrument before. Yikes! Twain described other people standing around in huge crowds waving palm branches and singing hymns all day everyday for eternity, off key or not. As Mark Twain described it, eternity does sound awful... and boring.

So what **will** we be like in eternity? What about the people who have died that we remembered this morning? Can they see us, do our loved ones hear us when we talk to them? Do they pray for us? Will we recognize our friends and family because they still look the same? Jesus said there is no marriage in heaven so what will our relationship be to the person we were married to here? What age will we be? If we're disabled here, will we still be disabled? Will we see our pets in heaven? Let's face it, there's a lot we don't know about what we will be in God's future.

I like what the late Senate Chaplain Peter Marshall said about what we can know about heaven. Before a baby is born, it can recognize its mother's voice. There are even books for us to read to our babies before birth. If you shine a bright light onto the mother's abdomen, the baby inside will react to it. If you push the baby, it will kick your hand away. Babies before birth can react to music too. How many of you women here ever sang to your babies before they were born? Yet, with all these glimpses of life after birth, how much does the unborn child understand about life outside the womb? Not much, just the sound of one or two voices and the sensation of movement, music and light.

Chaplain Peter Marshall said we are like that unborn child. We know as much about life after death as the unborn child knows about life after birth. We get glimpses of that life- music and laughter coming from the other side, stories of a great city where all is peace and joy and light and we will see Christ face to face. War is gone, pain is gone, sickness and death are gone. And sometimes we get a glimpse of that eternity during worship. I especially glimpse it when I hear the beautiful swelling music of a great choir, especially a racially mixed choir because God's family has kids of all nations. We comfort ourselves thinking about heaven, but in reality, it'll be a mystery until we get there. We trust that mystery by faith.

So what can we know? John says that when Christ returns we shall see him as he is- not as he was, not as an infant in a manger, or a child in the temple, or as an adult teacher walking around Israel, or even as the man hanging on a bloody cross. We shall see him as he *is* in eternity- risen from the dead, Lamb of God, King of kings, Lord of lords. And best of all, Pastor John says we shall finally be like him. No more failing to live up to the life of faith, no more struggling with temptation. No more trouble loving. No more doubts, or fears. When we see Jesus, the very sight of him will transform us from the inside out, we'll be changed in the twinkling of an eye as Paul says in Thessalonians. His attributes of holiness will become ours and we will be holy through and through. When Jesus comes, the family resemblance that began in us when we first believed, will finally be complete.

So how should we respond to all this? *"The one who has this hope purifies himself as he is pure."* In other words, in light of all that awaits us, don't live as though this is all there is. Let the family resemblance show! Don't just casually live out our days until we die, but be committed to living Jesus' way in every moment and situation. With Jesus, pray everyday that we will glorify the Father and then spend the day looking for ways to do that. Letting God change us more into Christ's likeness. Putting aside unpure ways because we have a hope that guides us. And when we fail- because we will- we confess it to God, receive his forgiveness, and start again. Friends, **now** we are children of God, and one day, we shall see Christ as he is and we shall be like him. In the meantime, are we letting the God's family resemblance show?

COMMUNION SLIDE

When I was growing up and the extended family gathered for a meal, there were too many of us to fit at the table, so the kids sat at the kids' table. Today, we gather around this Lord's Table, and it's a kids' table because it's set for us as God's children. This table reminds us over and over how great is the Father's love that God's Son Jesus Christ would give his life for us while we were yet sinners. At this table our hearts get to "reach out and touch him and say that we love him" as we just sang.