

Easter 3B, 2009

Text: 1 John 3:1-7

Title: Children of God

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No vacation for Jesus. Even after a busy Holy Week, a busy Easter morning, a busy Easter evening, and a busy Sunday after Easter, Jesus is still at work. You'd think He'd be ready for a vacation. You'd think Jesus would need some time off. But Jesus is still at work.

This morning Jesus is here once more, and He's still at work among us. Jesus has a special joy this morning as He joins Rachel to His death and resurrection. God the Father is busy, too, and this morning He makes Rachel His child.

John has quite a bit to say in His first epistle about what it means to be a child of God. 15 times in this short letter, John refers to us as children.

But if you look around this church on a typical Sunday, you won't see many children. In fact most of the people you see have their own children, and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But God calls us children, and that's what we're going to consider this morning. How can God still call us children? What does it mean for us to be children of God?

As a culture, we have a high view of children, at least in general. Some don't value the lives of unborn children, and sadly some children are abused. But in general, we are a very youth-focused culture. We love our kids, and folks spend time and money trying to be kids again.

We make great sacrifices for our children. We make sacrifices to provide them with everything they need, and everything they want. We want them to have a better life than we did. If anything, we tend to spoil and indulge our children. But we do this because we love them.

But that's not always been the case. In the ancient world, most children were looked down upon. The Greeks and Romans didn't think very highly of children. They saw how weak children were. Children are powerless and insignificant. Children are undisciplined. Children are ignorant. Children were basically seen as immature adults. Beatings were common. Children were useless until they were smart enough or skilled enough to contribute to the family and society.

Consider what happened when mothers were bringing their children to Jesus. The disciples tried to send them away. Jesus certainly had more important people to deal with than these women and children, or so the disciples thought. When Jesus took those children into His arms, it shocked the disciples. They didn't think that children were worth being bothered with.

But back to our text from 1 John. John calls us "children". Everyone. Young and old. When John calls us "children", this would seem a bit odd to the original recipients of his letter. For most people at this time, it would be a tremendous insult to be called a child.

Even more odd is the fact that John includes himself as a child. John writes, “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!”

John includes himself as a child of God. John is writing this letter near the end of his life. He was probably at least 75 or 80 years old when he writes this letter. And yet even as an old man, John delights to be a child of God. He still considers Himself a child of God.

Now what’s so great about being a child? Nothing, really. Children are weak and helpless. That’s not the point. It’s all about whose child you are. That “of God” makes all the difference. You are a child of God. Just being childlike or childish is not a big deal. Being a child of God, however, that is something to get excited about.

You are all children of God. God is your Father. God became your Father when you were baptized. When the water was poured and the words were spoken, “In the name of the Father” you were reborn, born of water and the Spirit, and you became a member of God’s family. God became your Father.

Most of you were probably baptized as infants, when you were Rachel’s age. Most of you probably don’t remember your baptism. Most of you probably didn’t make a conscious choice to be baptized. But that’s okay.

How many of you remember your birth? How many of you chose your parents?

It’s not about you, it’s about God and what He’s done for you. He has made you His child out of His great love. He chose to be your Father.

God knew everything about you. He knew what kind of a child you would be. He knew about your temper, He knew about your selfishness, He knew about the messes you would make. He knew everything about you. And still God chose you. God adopted you and made you His child. The family wouldn’t be the same without you.

Look around you. Go ahead, take a look. These are your brothers and sisters. You are brothers and sisters, not because you look alike, or because you grew up together, or because you play nice with one another, but because you all have the same Father.

We confess this every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer together. How does it begin? “Our Father.” God is our Father. All of us share the same Father.

As a child, you are dependent on your parents. You trust in your parents to provide everything for you- to keep food on the table and a roof over your head, to take you where you need to go, to entertain you and make you happy, and most of all to love you. Children don’t think about these things, they just trust their parents.

That’s the same faith that you have in your Father. Trusting that your Father will take care of you and love you and give you everything that you need.

Jesus says, “So do not worry saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” God has made you His child, and God will take care of you.

Now children tend to take after their parents. There’s always talk of whose nose or whose eyes or whose ears the baby has. But often there’s personality and behavior as well. Children will imitate their parents. This also goes for you children of God. As St. Paul writes, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children.”

In our text, John speaks in terms of sin and righteousness. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Sin is not the Father’s way. That’s Satan’s way and it’s not for you. You’re not Satan’s child, so don’t act like him.

Sin is harmful to you and those around you.

There are certain things you teach your children to do and certain things you teach them not to do. Play nice. Share. Be careful. Don’t stay out too late. Let me know where you are and what you’re doing.

You teach them these things because you love them and you want them to be safe and happy, not because you want to spoil all their fun.

And God teaches you the family rules, too:

Love Him.

Respect His name.

Take time to hear His word.

Respect authority.

Don’t hurt each other.

Love your spouse.

Don’t take things that aren’t yours.

Don’t lie.

Be content with what you’ve been given.

These are the family rules, that your Father gives you because He loves you. Basically, He wants you to be like Him. As Jesus says, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Now we will fall short. All children do. But we don’t throw out the rules or stop trying.

Your parents will always love you. There’s nothing you can do to put yourself outside of their love. But you still shouldn’t act up just because you know that you’ll be forgiven.

And Jesus takes care of our sins for us. As John writes, “But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins.” John says this so matter of factly. You know this. You know you’re forgiven. You know that Jesus came and died for you. You were here for Holy Week. You’ve been taught this all your life, from baptism on. Jesus appeared to take away your sins.

And Jesus will appear again. “But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” When Jesus comes back you will be transformed to be just like him. You will be perfect children, just like your heavenly Father, when Jesus comes to take you home.

Even in heaven, you’ll still be God’s child. God will care for you and provide for you just as He always does.

You are God’s child. One last thing about children. Child always want more. They are never satisfied. They always want more gifts. They’re always asking more questions. They’re always learning, always growing.

Don’t be afraid to be a child in this way also. Come on back every week so that your Father can give you more gifts. Come to Bible class and continue to learn from your Father. Ask questions. Be curious. There’s always more to learn, always more to explore in your Father’s house. He’s always doing something. He’s always busy caring for you, His children.