

Pastor's Message – 4/18/2021

1 John 3:1-7

Today, we are already two weeks past Easter Sunday. On this, the Third Sunday of Easter, the surprises are over. Jesus has risen and appeared several times. The news is out. Everyone knows the score as far as the resurrection goes.

The evidence is clear: He is alive. He has risen from the dead. The tomb is empty. The cross has been defeated. God has done this because of His love for creation, including, and especially, humanity. Through Jesus, God has made the hope, promise, and guarantee of salvation a reality. God's desire is that none should be lost and that all would accept the invitation to be a part of the family of God.

The Bible has spoken repeatedly; there is a thread of God's love shot all the way through from Genesis to Revelation:

+ "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" (Isaiah 45:22).

+ "Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet" (Matthew 22:9).

+ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

+ "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

+ "... God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

+ "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

+ "Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

If you believe, if you accept, the promises of God, you come to the next part: the "so what" part. So, what does that mean as far as my life goes? What am I supposed to do in response to that good news? How am I supposed to behave? What changes am I supposed to make in my life?

How, in other words, am I supposed to take my “knowing” and change it into “doing?”

The Bible reading for today, from John’s 1st Letter, makes some clear and helpful suggestions:

In 1 John we are told, first, that we are to “abide in him.” It is no longer acceptable to simply admire him or follow him around or even love him. We are to abide, that is, live, in him. Paul, in his Letters, will later express this as “putting on Christ” as one might put on a coat. Actors speak of “getting into character” and then letting the character they are portraying inhabit their body. John says that believers, followers, of Jesus, are already children of God, but are not finished yet. Believers are still on a journey, still, as John Wesley said, moving on to perfection in love.

This may begin to point at what John is talking about.

Those who are spiritually born of God are indeed “children of God.” We might say that the children of God are the product of God’s own imagination going all the way back to creation, when God created humankind in God’s own image (Genesis 1:26-27). In the introduction to the gospel of John (which was likely written by the same writer who gave us 1, 2 and 3 John), we read that Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the perfect image of God, the one who has “made him [God] known” to the world” (John 1:18). “Those who receive him have been given power to become children of God, who were born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

All of this is at God’s initiative, out of God’s imagination, and through God’s love. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are” (1 John 3:1). But we aren’t merely God’s children now, John goes on to say. We are to imagine something more.

Have you ever watched a group of young children playing together? One thing you will notice is that each of them believes that they are more than they appear to be. Give them a bunch of pillows and blankets, and they are no longer small children, but mighty warriors constructing an impenetrable fortress. Tie a tea towel around their neck and they transform from a mild-mannered kindergartner into an invincible caped crusader. Give them a leftover cardboard tube and suddenly they are a wizard, a musician, or an astronomer

scouting the stars. They imagine something more, "something," as a favorite hymn reads, "God alone can see." Their imagination transcends the limits of the present physical world and the limits of a child's inner world, opening new ways of seeing and being.

All children, especially children of God, are called to imagine more – to see what only those who are in God can see and recognize. To put it another way, the children of God are to imagine themselves in the person of Jesus Christ and act accordingly. Like children wrapping themselves in the garb of the hero they want to be, we are to "put on Christ," as Paul imagines in Romans 13:14 and Galatians 3:27. As a child might imagine being a force for pure good in the world, children of God who imagine that they can be like Jesus also "keep themselves pure, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

Although read as a whole, our Bible reading can easily be split into two parts emphasizing "being children of God" and "behaving as children of God." As followers of Jesus live into their identity as "children of God," we begin to look different than those who don't know God.

- We love our neighbors as ourselves.
- We listen for God's voice, not our own.
- We consider ourselves to be subject one to another, sacrifice for each other, and put the needs of others before our own.
- We practice kindness and charity.
- We bear each other's burdens.
- We forgive rather than bear a grudge.
- We become more than what we are.

The story is told of two elderly men, roommates in a nursing home. One had recently gone blind and was living in quiet despair. He felt that life held little for him. He wanted only to die.

His roommate could see just fine, but he had trouble getting around. He rarely left his bed, which was next to the window of their room.

Neither one could remember how it happened, but one day, the man who could see began describing to his roommate what was going on in the world outside their window. He told him of the mail carrier making his rounds; of neighbors walking their dogs; of the

teenage boy and girl who passed the window every day after school — who first held hands, then embraced, then had an argument, then reconciled once again.

As the days went on, the blind man came to live for these updates from the outside world. His friend seemed to take such joy in it and had a real gift for describing what everything looked like.

Then one day his friend — who was much sicker than he knew — died. A new roommate took his place.

The blind man asked his new roommate if he would let him know what was happening outside the window.

"I'd be glad to," said the roommate, "but I don't know how I could do that. There's nothing outside our window but a solid brick wall."

The blind man was bewildered for a moment. He felt betrayed by his former friend. Had he been playing him for a fool? But then he realized, in a flash, what a precious gift his friend had given. He had spun, out of nothing but the stuff of his imagination, an entire world. He had dreamt up the mail carrier, and the neighbors, and the pair of teenage lovers — and he'd made those characters as real as if they'd lived outside that window, every day.

In that moment of revelation, the man realized there are things worse than having no sight. It is far worse to have no imagination, no inner vision.

In his first Letter, John calls us to imagine and to live into who we can become as children of God. Later in his John's letter, he talks about what it means to be like Christ. It means to love as Christ loved. "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

Are we living as children of God? Are we allowing God's Spirit to work in our lives so that we are growing more and more Christlike in the way we love one another?

As children of God, we're not called to become Christians. We're not called to become church members. We're not called to become successful. We're not called to become powerful. We're not called to impress the world or even to be understood by the world. We're called to become like Christ. Amen.