

## Sermon for April 29, 2012 – Easter 4

1 John 3:1-6

### Theme: A child of God . . .

- 1) *is who you are.*
- 2) *Live like one!*

*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 reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. <sup>4</sup> Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.*

Knowing yourself has a huge impact on how you are going to live. For example, if an athlete convinces himself that he is a failure, guess what will happen: he will be a failure. On the other hand the athlete who says to himself: “I have the gifts and the talent. I trained hard. I can do this” usually succeeds in what he does. Knowing who we are and what we are capable of has a huge effect on our earthly lives. This same truth applies to us spiritually as well.

So let us then ask the question: who are we? St. John tells us the answer: You are a child of God. So, live like one!

### Part One: A child of God is who you are.

Our sermon begins: *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!*

We are children of God. Just think about what that means! Parents love their children. They watch over their kids and give them opportunities to learn and succeed. Parents provide for their children the best they can. Now apply these truths to our relationship with God and think about what it means that we are His children.

And this point leads to my next question: Who is St. John referring to when he says “we” are children of God? The “we” refers to believers who, through repentance and faith, have been washed clean from all sin and adopted into God’s family. Through the preaching of the law we came to realize our complete unworthiness before God. We looked with horror upon our sins and know that they justly deserve God’s punishment. And yet we trust that God is merciful and will forgive us. What gives us this hope? God’s own promise, recorded also by St. John: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (1John 1:9)

And God has not turned us away. He forgives us for Christ’s sake. In love, he adopts us as his own, for it was he himself who led us to confess our need for him. It was his Spirit that sought us out through the proclamation of the Word, so that he could have mercy on us.

And, through the waters of baptism, God sealed us as his very own children. St. Paul says: <sup>26</sup> *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,* <sup>27</sup> *for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* (Galatians 3:26-27) Yes, all who believe and are baptized are considered children of God. All our sins have been washed away through the blood of Christ.

If you are a believer, then you most certainly are a child of God. But we don’t feel like God’s children, do we? The world laughs at us for our faith. If we are children of God, why is this the case? St. John tells us: *The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.* Since the world has no use for God, it has no use for God’s children. It is because we are children of God that we experience trouble and persecution from the world. But take heart. Why? St. John tells us:

*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.*

The reality of who we are is just waiting to be revealed, and it will be revealed what Christ comes again. Then the veil of sin and unbelief will be removed, and the glory that we now possess by faith will be revealed most fully. Just as we are like Christ in the suffering and ridicule we experience now on this earth of his sake, so we will be like him in glory – as St. Paul says: <sup>49</sup> *And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.* (1 Corinthians 15:49) And again: *our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* (Romans 8:18)

Wow, what wonderful love the Father has lavished upon us. By God's grace and through Jesus work of redemption, we have become children of God. He adopted us through baptism – marking us as his very own through the gift of the Holy Spirit he poured out upon us. We are under his protection, his love and his care. And this idea of being a “child of God” is not a mere metaphor – it is reality. We are princes and princesses of heaven, judges over all the earth. St. Paul alludes to this truth, when he says: *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . .* <sup>3</sup> *Do you not know that we will judge angels?* (1 Corinthians 6:2-3) Yes, what glory will be revealed in us when Christ returns! We are the children of God.

### Part Two: Live like one.

Remember what I said at the beginning of the sermon: understanding who you are has a huge impact on how you live? That means that if you know you are a child of God, then live like one! Well, how does a child of God live? To answer that question, we have to look no further than Christ Jesus himself.

St John says: *Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.* <sup>4</sup> *Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.* <sup>5</sup> *But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.*

Jesus appeared to take away sin – this is why he suffered and died on the cross. And he did take our sin away. We are pure and holy in God's sight because of what Christ has done. Let us remain in this purity by living to his glory. Let us remain in this purity by not sinning willingly.

St. Paul put it this way: *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20) In response to God's great love for us, we crucify all our evil desires and passions. We desire to thank God – just as a child wants to please his parents who have been so good to him. And so we avoid sin. Now, this does not mean that we will never sin. Until the day we die, we will have an evil nature that will try to tempt us away from Christ, that will trip us up into sin when we least expect it. When this happens we go to the cross, seeking Christ's forgiveness and help.

But what we can avoid is living in sin. St. John says: *No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.*

Listen to how Martin Luther explains these verses: [St. John] *does not tolerate the hypocritical Christians who consider it sufficient for them to believe that they are Christians, remain in sins and filth, and are not changed. If they believed sincerely that they are children of God, they would not be polluted but would purify themselves. . . [Christ] appeared in the flesh to take sins away, not to give license to sinning. With His blood Christ wanted to exhibit a holy church, not a church that is polluted.*

“But,” you might say, “I sin – not that I want to or desire it, but in my weakness I sin. Does this mean I am not a child of God?” To this, Luther replies: *We are all sinners, and now and then we fall into sin; but if a true Christian falls, he soon comes back, turns about, and fights against sin . . . All this is directed against the hypocrites. They say that they know God, but with their deeds they deny Him. . . He who is in Him, that is, in Christ, does not sin; for when Christ is present, sin is conquered.*

Take warning from this brothers and sisters in Christ: if we let our own sinful desires continually carry us away, then we show ourselves to be children of the devil and not children of God. Christ came to purify us from sin, not to give us an excuse to wallow in it!

But if you dear Christian are worried, if you are sorry for your sins and ask the Lord to forgive and help you, then know this: *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out* (Matthew 12:20) God forgives you for Christ's sake. You are free from all sin, you are righteous and holy in His sight. You are his dearly loved child, concerning whom he will command his angels to protect. He clothes you in Christ's righteousness and surrounds you with His presence. He will instruct you and watch over all your ways and deliver you safely to his kingdom. Why? Because you are his precious, dearly loved child in whom He takes great pleasure. May this truth lead us to thank him with our lives – living to his glory. Amen.