

Sermon for April 26, 2015 – Easter 4

1 John 3:1-5 (NIV84)

Theme: Behold the Love of the Father

- 1) *Even now we are children of God (1,3-5)*
- 2) *When He comes it will be clear. (2)*

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. 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. ³ Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. ⁴ Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵ But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

I remember a period in my life when I felt especially worthless. I would look in the mirror and ask myself: “Who am I?”

I was never really good at sports, nor all that smart in school. I was actually quite nerdy and a lot of classmates teased me – especially since I was a pastor’s kid. Who was I? I certainly didn’t feel like anyone special. Would I ever be?

Who are you? Do you ever look in the mirror and wonder? Are there times in life when you feel insignificant or unloved? You are not alone. Everybody goes through periods like this.

Where can we find our identity and worth? Will making more money make us more valued? Absolutely not! There are many rich people ruining their lives with drugs and wild living because they don’t feel loved. Do we find our identity in our health, social standing, material possessions or accomplishments? Can we find our sense of belonging among friends and family? Even if we think we can, the Bible reminds us that “*all men are liars.*”ⁱⁱ In other words, if we try to find our identity in the perception other people have of us, we will inevitably be disappointed.

Where, then, can we find our true value and identity? St John tells that we find it in the love God expresses towards us in Christ Jesus! Let us consider this truth, under the theme: **Behold the Love of the Father.** 1) *Even now we are children of God.* 2) *When He comes it will be clear.*

Part One: Even now we are children of God.

Our text 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!*

Dear Christian, just think: when you look into the mirror, you are looking at a child of God!

Now don’t just think of this phrase superficially as the world does. People often say: “It doesn’t matter what you believe because we are all God’s children through creation.” This is not true. Yes, God did create all people, but when the Bible calls a believer a child of God it means much more than that such a person is a part of His creation. It means that believers are special – uniquely chosen by Him out of this world.

But, why does God consider us His children? Is it because we are better than other people? Absolutely not! The truth is that we, in and of ourselves, are really worthless. Our sins repulse God so much that they make us dead to Him – as St. Paul once said: *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.*ⁱⁱ

There you have it: we have offered God absolutely no reason to value and love us; but He does so anyway. Why? Simply because of who He is; simply because he chooses to love us. And how did God express this love so as to make us His children? By sending his Son to become human like us. He did this so that Jesus could live under the law in order to keep it perfectly; something every other human has failed to do. And when Jesus accomplished this goal, he exchanged His perfection (which we call righteousness) for our sins and went to the cross to suffer and die for them all. This is how He reconciled us to God.

And now that Jesus has been raised from the dead, He offers His righteousness as a free gift to all. Everyone who takes hold of it through repentance and faith is changed. Such a person is adopted into God's family through baptism. How so? Because the Bible says that, through baptism, the LORD both creates and strengthens saving faith in a person's heart – declaring from His heavenly throne: "This is my child whom I love." And when God makes this declaration over us, we cease to be what we were (namely, his enemies). We become a new creation. We become members of God's family. Yes, *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!*

Now, you might ask, "If God has declared me to be His child through faith, what impact will this have on my life?"

First of all it must be said that a child of God will not purposely live a life of continuous rebellion and sin. To do so would show that you do not have saving faith in your heart. Such a person is a son of Satan. No, a child of God will strive to avoid the things that displease his heavenly Father, as verse 3 and 4 of our text read: ³ *Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. ⁴ Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.* In other words, if you have been purified from sin through your faith in Christ, you will try to keep yourself pure from sin out of love for Christ.

"But what if I fall into sin and tarnish the righteousness Christ won for me? Can I be restored? Will God still love me as His child?"

The very last verse of our text answers that question: ⁵ *But you know that he [Jesus] appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.* Christ Jesus came to purify us from sin, and, through faith in him, we are most certainly pure. Our sins are gone forever! This fact moves us to live for our Lord all the more, as St. John wrote earlier in this letter: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*ⁱⁱⁱ

What do you see when you look at yourself in the mirror? I will tell you what God sees: He sees Jesus and loves you as dearly as He loves Him. Even though you still fall into sin many times a day, God still considers you his dearly loved child through faith in His Son. And God promises that there is nothing in all creation that will be able to separate you from His love. Yes, even now you are God's dearly loved child, and when He comes again, the world will know it to be true!

Part Two: When He comes it will be clear

Ah yes, the world. It doesn't believe that we are God's children and mocks us for claiming so. Persecution is on the rise and many Christians are suffering horribly. Why is this so? The simple answer is that the world does not accept the LORD as true God. If the world does not believe in the LORD, how can it believe that we are His children? Jesus himself warned us of this, when he said to his disciples: *"If the world hates you keep in mind that it hated me first."*^{iv}

This is why the Holy Spirit inspired John to write: 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.*

St. Paul also echoes this encouragement when He wrote: *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*^v

On this earth we may face all sorts of pain and sorrow because we belong to God. The world will ridicule and mock us, but, on the Last day, it will all be over: we will be publicly revealed as God's children. The LORD will raise us from the dead, transforming our bodies to resemble Christ's glorious body, as the Scriptures state: *just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. . .*⁵¹ *Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--*⁵² *in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.*⁵³ *For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.*^{vi}

What beauty God will bestow on us on that day! When Christ comes, we will be glorified. Every sinful imperfection clinging to us will disappear, and yet who will we be? We will continue to be ourselves – only perfected!

Dear Christian, whenever you look in the mirror and find yourself asking, "Who am I?" splash water on your face and remember your baptism. Then declare: "I am a child of God, loved by the Father so much that He gave up His only begotten Son to save me. And if he gave up his Son for me, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give me all things? I am a child of God through faith in Jesus my Savior; and as such I will strive to live as the holy child God declared me to be. If I sin, I will repent - trusting that God will forgive me for Christ's sake. And in the peace of this forgiveness I will live - facing each hardship on this sin cursed earth with the trust that, no matter what I experience, God loves me! Christ is coming again soon – just as He promised - and then the truth about me will be revealed: namely, that I'm a child of God!" Thank you, Lord, for this most wonderful gift. Amen.

ⁱ Psalm 116:11 (NIV84)

ⁱⁱ Ephesians 2:1-5 (NIV84)

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 John 2:1-2 (NIV84)

^{iv} John 15:18 (NIV84)

^v Romans 8:16-18 (NIV84)

^{vi} 1 Corinthians 15:49, 51-53(NIV84)