

Psalm 4
1 John 3:1-7

Third Sunday of Easter
Midway Presbyterian Church
April 18, 2021

Live as God's Children

Introduction to the Psalm

Our Psalm for this Third Sunday of Easter presents an Israelite who seeks to defend himself against false accusations. With hope of vindication, he brings his plight to the God who has previously delivered him from distress. We hear a call to reverence and to the avoidance of sin. With a clear conscience the righteous are able to lie down and sleep in peace. Listen to these words from Psalm 4...

Introduction to the Epistle

Our Epistle Lesson today was probably written sometime after the Gospel of John for a community that knew and loved that Gospel. By grace, they are declared to be children of God. They are to recognize this status before God and seek to live as God's children. Listen to these words from 1 John 3:1-7...

Sermon

One of the joys of being a Christian is “that we should be called children of God.” William Barclay points out the close connection between two words whose meanings are yet quite different: *Paternity* and *fatherhood*. *Paternity* indicates that the father is responsible for the physical existence of a child. But it could be, and sadly sometimes is the case, that this father has never even seen his child. In fact, he may not even know that the child exists. He is merely the biological father of the child. While *fatherhood* speaks of a loving, ongoing relationship in which the father gives time and care in the raising of the child. He works to provide food, clothes, and shelter. He comforts when you are sick, encourages when you are down, assures

when you are frightened. An adopted child may know that kind of love and care from a person who is not the biological father.

In the Old Testament we read of the Covenant of God being established with Abraham and the people of Israel. In the carrying out of his purpose to bless all the nations, God chose Israel to be his special people. He will be their God, and they will be his people. (Gen. 12:1-3)

And in the New Testament we find the concept of adoption, as Paul wrote to the Galatians:

But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. (Gal. 4:4-5)

Or again, as Paul wrote to the church in Rome:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba, Father.*” 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. (Rm. 8:14-17)

John Calvin said that,

the children of believers are baptized not in order that they who were previously strangers to the church may then for the first time become children of God, but rather that, because by the blessing of the promise they already belonged to the body of Christ, they are received into the church with this solemn sign.

Our self-worth and our status before God is based on the fact that God loves us and calls us to be his children.

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.” (Jn. 3:1)

Yes, we are God’s children—*now*, not sometime in the distant future. One day we will be like Christ. With this hope we seek to purify ourselves—with Christ as our example of purity.

Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. (Heb. 12:1b-2a)

Knowing that we are God's children should encourage us to seek to live as Jesus did.

In verses 1-3 our lesson shifts from a focus on our *being* children of God to a focus on our *living* as children of God in verses 4-7. Our Psalm declares:

Tremble and do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent. (4:4)

In verse 6 John makes this disturbing statement:

No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues
to sin has either seen him or known him.

It may well be that what is meant is that no one who abides in Christ will habitually sin—make a practice of sinning. No one who abides in him will keep on sinning, as though a relationship with Christ makes no difference in a person's life. A child of God will seek to honor his Heavenly Father. He will seek to abide in fellowship with him and thereby he will seek to follow God's teachings.

While the writer acknowledges that if we say we have *no* sin, "we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1:8) In the Gospel of John we read of Jesus forgiving an adulterous woman, while the teachers of the law and the Pharisees would have her stoned, as the law prescribed. Jesus said, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone." Then he said to the woman, "go and sin no more." (Jn. 8:2-11) Even the most faithful believers sometimes sin, but they do not cherish such a sin or continually choose to commit it. Rather they repent, confess, and find forgiveness. They seek to turn their backs on that sin. They seek to go and commit that sin no more.

I read of some answers to science test questions given by fifth and sixth graders. For example, one described the law of gravity by saying, “no fair jumping up without coming back down.” Another said, “You can listen to thunder and tell how close you came to getting hit.” And this one: “Genetics explains why you look like your father—and if you don’t, why you *should*.” In the context of our lesson, this one really hits home: “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...” But is there any family resemblance? There should be. If we are children of God, the world should be able to see the family resemblance. We should resemble the Lord Jesus Christ, seeking to have the same mind and heart that we see in him.

There’s a story of a man who seemed to embody the way of Christ and reflect his status as a child of God. He was a Civil War chaplain who was ministering to a wounded soldier on the battlefield. He asked the soldier if he would like to hear a few verses from the Bible. The wounded man said, “No, I’m so thirsty, I’d rather have some water.” The chaplain gave him a drink, then repeated his question. “No sir, not now—but could you put something under my head?” The chaplain did so, and again repeated his question, “Would you like to hear a few verses from the Bible?” “No,” said the soldier, “I’m cold. Could you cover me up?” The chaplain took off his inside coat and wrapped the soldier in it. Afraid to ask, he did not repeat his question. The chaplain started to leave, but the soldier called him back. “Look, Chaplain, if there’s anything in that book of yours that makes a person do for another what you’ve done for me, then I want to hear it.”

There was a recent article by Joseph D’Hippolito in the *Wall Street Journal* in the “Houses of Worship” column. It tells about the construction of a new worship center in the former East Berlin—a center which the author says represents the ultimate secular view of

religion, while reflecting the kind of cultural future that some envision for us here in the United States. D'Hippolito writes:

The House of One, to be built on the foundation of a demolished church, will enable Christians, Jews, and Muslims to worship under one roof. Each faith will have its own sanctuary surrounding a central hall that will serve “as a place of public encounter, much like an urban square surrounded by different buildings,” according to the architectural firm Kuehn Malvezzi.

“East Berlin is a very secular place,” Roland Stolte, a Christian theologian involved in the project, told the Guardian. “Religious institutions have to find new language and ways to be relevant, and to make connections.” In other words, religion must conform to, not challenge, the secular ethos.

D'Hippolito goes on to say:

The House of One’s boxy, modernist, sterile architecture expresses that idea. In trying to incorporate features from all three faiths, the building reflects none of them. In trying not to offend, it fails to inspire.

So how can we, in the midst of an increasingly secular society, nurture our sense of identity as God’s children? And how can we grow in our ability to overcome sin and live as a child of God? Certainly, by praying as Jesus taught us, to our Father who art in heaven. By meditating upon God’s word. By participating in Sunday School and Worship. By joining in outreach ministries of the church. By supporting the church with our time, talent and financial resources.

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! (1 Jn. 3:1)

But being a child of God means living as a child of God. It means that people should be able to see a family resemblance.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.