

April 11, 2021

1 John 3:1-7

“See What Kind of Love the Father has Given
to Us!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

See What Kind of Love the Father has Given to Us! Roughly two-thousand years since the foot of the cross and the empty tomb, where do we go in order to see it all? There is no way for us to see it other than to look into the historical record and eye-witness testimony that is found in the New Testament Scripture. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we hear through what was heard and we see through what was seen and we touch through the hands of those who touched. As John writes at the beginning of his first epistle (1:2), "... the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us ..."

In this way we are connected to the people of the past and are in fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. In the means of grace, all of the eternal gospel treasures, which are found in Jesus our Savior and might seem so far away, are a power that transcends time and space in such a way that they are offered and bestowed upon us. This is a miracle. So we are bid to look closely - to See! And this is done whenever by the power of the Holy Spirit working in the Word and Sacraments we actually believe in such incredible other-worldly and wonderful treasures in Jesus our Savior. We share in the joy of people who are now long gone and even waiting for us to be with them and our one Redeemer.

Is it not a great miracle when we come to our gospel account and read eye-witness testimony and walk away not only certain that it is so, but that it was all for us too? The whole unbelieving world should stop in its tracks and ponder how it is that we are made certain that Jesus rose from the dead by words that Jesus spoke to his apostles long ago. Having said to them "Peace to You!" they were troubled and doubted. He then says to them, "... See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see ..." and by the words of Jesus spoken to people long ago, it is we who are no longer troubled but now certain that it is really the resurrected Jesus in whom we are forgiven. He opens up the minds of twenty-first century people through the writings of first century men.

The kind of love that the Father has given to us is powerfully expressed in what should be very familiar words to all of us: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:9-11)." The kind of love that has been bestowed on us is a love which sacrifices the self for another. Jesus gave up himself and shed his blood to cover our sins and deliver us from death and hell. When we look at his hands and feet we are reminded of the cross and everything that went with it. We are to understand that this was what we deserved. He was also buried for us, and one might reason that he should remain dead, but this is the perfect Savior who rises from the grave in order that we might rise with him. He speaks, "Peace to YOU!" Your sins are forgiven and you will live.

The death and resurrection of Jesus our Savior takes us to the opening words of our epistle lesson for this morning. **See What Kind of Love the Father has Given to Us!** that we should be called the children of God. We are God's children because our old selves have died with Christ and a new people have been raised into a restored relationship with him. What does it mean to be children of God? To begin

with, it means that we have faith in Jesus and are now reconciled to the Father and restored to the household. Like the prodigal son, who returned home, even after squandering all that he has on riotous living, we have been embraced by the Father who commands that we are to be clothed with the best robe, given a ring to be placed on our finger with shoes on our feet. He commands a feast that all may celebrate.

Secondly, our lesson tells us that as children of God we no longer follow the course of this unbelieving world. In fact, the unbelieving world no longer knows who we are because they do not know Christ and cannot accept Christ in us. But this should not bother us at all for we are looking forward to seeing our resurrected Savior and being like him, “because we shall see him as he is.” These are words of Easter joy for all of us who feel as if we have lost everything in this life - for all of us who feel the sentence of death for what we have become and who feel relegated to a tomb because we are hated. While we cannot touch upon every detail of what it will mean to be like Jesus, in the spirit of Easter we may at least consider the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 (42-49) as he speaks of the resurrection of the dead:

What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body ... The first man [Adam] was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man [Jesus] is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Thirdly, as children of God, who shall see Jesus and become like him, John tells us that “every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” These words echo the words of Jesus in the *Sermon on the Mount*: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matt. 5:8).” A pure heart is a heart that is at peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ who suffered and died for the forgiveness of our sins. One can hardly talk about a pure heart without also talking about a good conscience and a sincere faith in Jesus (1 Tim. 1:5). All of these go together. When the conscience feels the terrors of God’s wrath against sin, only faith in the purity that comes from Jesus alone will help. In Jesus, we are declared pure, and when faith holds on to that declaration of purity, the heart itself is called a pure heart and the conscience must cease its accusations and finally be at rest.

Now, while we are declared pure in heart, this does not mean that we are entirely pure. For now, we make a distinction between being declared pure and being pure. We all look forward to becoming pure in every way. For now, we are counted as pure, but we are in the process of becoming more and more pure while looking forward to being pure in that day when we will see Jesus as he is. So, by faith in the purity of Christ, our Father in heaven overlooks that part of us that is still struggling with sin. However, the apostle John warns us as children of God to avoid making “a practice of sinning.” Jesus did not come into this world to die for our sins so that we may sin all the more. He came into this world to take away sins. John writes:

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who

abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

John is not arguing for perfection in this life. No Christian can ever be perfect down here. The apostle is making a distinction between sins of malice and those of weakness. A sin of weakness is the type of sin that comes upon a child of God who is unaware. In other words, a believer sins without giving thought to the fact that this is lawlessness and it should not be done and will incur God's wrath. On the other hand, a sin of malice is when one belligerently sins after considering that this is lawlessness and it should not be done and will incur the wrath of God. Sins of weakness do not crush faith in God's children, but they are still a serious danger. Sins of malice crush faith. The child of God practices righteousness, that is, when one becomes aware and the terrors of conscience arise in the heart making it clear that what is about to be done is wrong and incurs punishment, the child of God says "no" to doing what is wrong and does what is right.

All of this is a rather scary thing to consider, for it would appear that we may practice sins of malice more often than what we might care to admit. Where there is repentance, that is, sorrow over sin and a faith in Christ for forgiveness, there is truly the restoration of the child of God. However, instead of overwhelming ourselves with what is faith destroying and what is not, we should simply heed the flashing red lights in our souls when we see them, and by doing so, stop sinning and practice righteousness. And if we fail to do so, and maliciously sin regardless of the flashing red lights in our souls, may God be merciful to us that we may remember and believe what John writes (1 John 2:1), "My little children, I am writing these things so that you may not sin, but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one."

Overall, may it always be that we **See What Kind of Love the Father has Given to Us!** that we should be called the children of God. And that is what we are! And by keeping in mind how that came to be and thereby daily dying to sin and being raised by faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, the children of God we will remain.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott

