

Children of the Family Sermon Six

I John 2:28 – 3:3 (Read Twice–2 versions)

When some of us look at babies, one of our favorite habits is to say things like, “Oh, she has her father’s nose.” Or, “That chin is just like her mother’s.” I sometimes wonder if these statements are to assure ourselves that the baby is biologically the correct child. I’m pretty sure that when we say, “She has her grandmother’s eyes,” we are trying to compliment the grandmother. And how often have we heard, “That kid’s temper is just like his grandfather’s.”

When did you notice you had some physical habits that were just like those of a parent? I noticed at some point, to my horror and surprise, that I have some physical gestures that are just like my fathers. For example, I find myself holding the car steering wheel, at the 3 and 9 positions, just above the cross piece, my little fingers outside the wheel and the rest of my fingers inside, with my thumb under the cross piece. I suspect all of us have been startled that we have some of the same physical habits as our parents.

I suspect many of us find ourselves like our parents in some ways, as much as we have consciously decided – to not act like our parents in certain ways. We unconsciously & consciously learn from the people around us. We pick up some habits, good and bad. And we probably catch some traits from our parents like, reading, prefer being outdoors, or a certain way of being inquisitive, and so on. This dynamic is just natural & normal.

The Apostle John picks up this idea and runs with it throughout First John. He calls his readers and us, “**children.**” Before we think this is a putdown, it’s not. It’s an expression of affection. It’s a verbal caress. I urge us to hear the tenderness and love being conveyed. Hear the warmth of a pastor for people he

knows and cares about. And hear the truth that God is great because he wants us to become his children.

John assumes his readers are children of God who are eager to abide in Christ, imitate Jesus, and are born of Jesus. So when John calls his readers children, he’s saying, we are in the family of God. He’s saying we are righteous, and do right, and love God and the things and values and attitudes of God. We are becoming pure – through our own work on ourselves and especially through the Holy Spirit’s power in us. We are on the road to acting like Jesus and walking in his light.

First John’s writing goes in circles. There are bite sized nuggets that delight. Some of his words are so direct with warnings, they should shake us to the core. Some places it’s hard to fully understand what he is teaching us, especially when we study the Greek and Hebrew meanings and allusions. And yet, as we repeatedly dive into this book, we are washed with assurance and comfort – like when we are called children of God. And John always goes back to how great God’s love is. Not as sentimental jibberjash. But love revealed in real life.

When Catherine Lawes' husband, Lewis, became the warden of Sing Sing prison in 1921, she was a young mother of 3 girls. Everybody warned her never to step foot inside the walls. But she didn't listen to them. When the first prison basketball game was held, in she went, three daughters in tow, and took a seat in the bleachers with the inmates.

When she heard that one convicted murderer was blind, she taught him Braille so he could read. Upon learning of inmates who were hearing impaired, she studied sign language so they could communicate. For sixteen years Catherine Lawes softened the hard hearts of the men of Sing Sing Prison.

The prisoners knew something was wrong when Lewis Lawes didn't report to work. Quickly the word spread that Catherine had been killed in a car accident. The following day as the acting warden took his early morning walk, he noticed a large gathering at the main gate. Every prisoner pressed against the fence. Eyes awash with tears. Faces solemn. No one spoke or moved.

The warden made a remarkable decision. "All right, men, you can go. Just be sure to check in tonight." These were America's hardest criminals. But the warden unlocked the gate for them, and they walked without escort or guard to the home of Catherine Lawes to pay their last respects. And each one returned.

Real love changes people. That's genuine love. That's true love. This is what Jesus offers to us and invites us to pick up and pass it on. God lavishes his love on us – in so many ways. It would be good to take inventory of every good and perfect gift God has given you. And of course, the greatest gift & blessing is that of Jesus, his teachings and example and sacrifice for you and I.

Do you realize that God didn't have to save us? He owes us nothing even though He created us. We owe Him greatly, but He owes us nothing. His blessings are not related to our intelligence, wealth, good looks or anything else that we might consider good about ourselves! God's gifts are a direct result of who He is! That's why we can be called his children. There is no better parentage! You may or may not like your ancestry, but the best is from above!

John keeps reminding us how great God's love is for us. He longs for us to choose to become part of his family. To be his born again children of God.

I had the privilege and opportunity to go to one of the early Promise Keepers events, with around 40,000 men in the Pontiac Silver Dome Michigan. At the recommitment call, the confessional call, the altar call, men went forward. It was the quietest time in the three day meeting. A lot of guys were praying and reflecting. A lot of eyes were closed & heads bowed. It was so quiet that after a while in the silence, a single voice was heard shouting once, "Welcome to the family!" The stadium immediately erupted. God wants us to know how great his love is for us.

Furthermore, John tells us, **God wants to reveal Himself to us.** We could focus on Jesus' second coming. But let's consider that as children we are expected to see the Father and pick up on his ideas and habits. So that when Jesus appears – we shall be like him. We are not just called the children of God – we are God's children, because of God's work for us through Jesus.

But we are often blind to God's will in life, because we either fail to read His Word and go by it or else we just stubbornly choose our own way in life. All of us could be better at walking in the light. It's true we cannot see God literally but we can see Him through the eyes of faith. We can see God when we compare people's actions and attitudes and ideas with the Bible. We are invited to open our minds and hearts to the guiding of the Holy Spirit. We are invited to trust that what we will be, will be revealed some day.

Then on that day we will be like Jesus. That is quite a promise. Right now, the reason the world doesn't know or understand followers of Jesus, is because it doesn't know Jesus. That's how different God's love is from the values of this world. But John assures us, what we know is that when Jesus is fully revealed, we will be like him, and we will see him as he is. He's telling us, that like

God's love, seeing Jesus some day, is a promise we can count on.

And I would suggest – when we see God's love at work around us, we see Jesus. I suspect this is happening more often than we notice. So John is saying – the incarnation of Jesus is real. It's not just theology – it's real.

Like the teacher who was helping one of her kindergarten students put on his boots? He asked for help and she could see why. With her pulling and him pushing, the boots still didn't want to go on. When the second boot was on, she had worked up a sweat. She almost blew up when the little boy said, "Teacher, they're on the wrong feet." She looked and sure enough, they were.

It wasn't any easier pulling the boots off than it was putting them on. She managed to keep her cool as together they worked to get the boots back on, this time on the right feet. He then announced, "These aren't my boots."

She bit her tongue rather than get right in his face and scream, "Why didn't you say so?" like she wanted to.

Once again she struggled to help him pull the ill-fitting boots off. He then said, "They're my brother's boots. My mom made me wear them."

She didn't know if she should laugh or cry. She mustered up the grace and courage she had left to wrestle the boots on his feet again. She said, "Now, where are your mittens?"

Children will be children. Yes, you and I are. Are we not still children? Are we not children of God? And do we not do and think and say silly things at times? The wonder is we see Jesus in each other through events of love, patience and dedication.

That's what the Holy Spirit is like with us. And in these kinds of acts, we see Jesus.

God is great because he wants to be able to call us children. God is great because he reveals himself to us in many ways. And God is great because, **we shall be like Him.**

God promises to clean you and me up. He not only takes on our sins, he purifies us, makes us holy, fit to be in his presence. As our Holy parent, God has this power to make us become like him. To love as he does. To detest sin. To think in the right ways. To have holy habits that show the light of Jesus.

500 years ago, the early Anabaptists & some other reformers were concerned about purity, holiness, and being true children of Jesus. They argued seriously for the sanctified, righteous life. Seeking holy living was as important as fighting sin in ourselves and in the world. Our spiritual ancestors stressed the value of living a Christlike life or "life that works." They were concerned John's moral, social, and doctrinal tests – lined up together in each follower of Jesus.

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas tells the following story. A Mennonite farmer went to town and was approached by a zealous evangelist. The man asked the farmer, "Are you saved?" The farmer wanted to know what that meant. "Is Jesus your Savior and Lord?" asked the man. The farmer took out a pencil and piece of paper and began writing. Then he gave it to the evangelist. The puzzled man asked how this list of names answered his question. The farmer told him that the people on the paper were his neighbors. They would have a better idea about his salvation than he did. They were able to observe his life. The farmer knew as a child of God – his neighbors were better judges of his salvation and character.

We know this verse, but it's important to remind us of who we are in Jesus. "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Phil 3:20-21)

John tells us, "All who have the hope Jesus offers, purifies themselves, just as Jesus is pure." What a promise! But it's not for just after death. It's for now. Some day we'll have a glorious body like His: no aches, no pains, no diseases, no aging, and so on. No band aids in heaven! No pills, no chemo, no blood pressure medication, etc. you name it.

But this is also a promise for now. Otherwise why would John make such a big deal about the false teaching about sin? We can imitate the purity of Jesus by abiding in him. By being his children. How pure? Perfectly pure. II Corinthians (5:21) "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Hebrews (4:15) offers this hope. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin."

I Peter (2:21-22) reminds us, "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

John tells us, "If we want to love God and let our love for God grow, don't focus on how much we love Him, focus on how much He loves us." This is the chief family likeness that the children of God will display: as God is righteous, as God is holy, we ought to be so as well.