

Pastor Joe Polzin
 1 John 3:1-7
 “When I Grow Up”
 Year B – Third Sunday of Easter
 April 15, 2017

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

There’s a question that we ask, ever since we’ve been young. The question is, “What do I want to be when I grow up?” It’s a question that we consider as we contemplate our future. It’s a question that I’m sure our Confirmands, who are taking their first communion here this morning, and are being confirmed next Sunday, ask as they consider what life will be like during, and after high school. But it’s a question that we all continue to ask, no matter how old we are.

Now, the form may change, but it’s essence of the question stays the same. What do I want to be when I grow up? What job do I want to get after high school? What do I want to study in college? What career do I want? Do I want to change careers? What will I do in retirement? How will I prepare for retirement? What do I want to be for the rest of my life?

We never stop asking the question. It’s our constant reflection on what the future holds, who we’ll be in the future, and then, depending on that answer, who we are today. You see, by how we answer the question, “What do I want to be when I grow up,” it determines and guides what we do today. Who we are right now. And no matter our place in life, we’re always someone *now*, and becoming someone *in the future*.

And if we wonder what God’s answer to this is, we don’t have to speculate. He tells us! Today, we heard His answer in our Epistle Reading from 1 John. And John writes, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (3:1).

What does God say about who we are and what we’ll be? His answer is His children. And in this first verse, you get the sense that John is marveling at this fact, and so we shouldn’t overlook it too quickly. Think about this. In Scripture, there is only one Son of the Father, Jesus. God sent His Son, the Word made flesh, as John writes in his Gospel, bringing life to a dead world, bringing light to a dark world. And why was this world dead and dark? Because of us. Because of our sin. Because of who we are and what we do. But God chose to reverse that, through His Son.

And it wasn’t easy. It wasn’t cheap. It would cost the Son of God his own life. He was humiliated on the cross. He suffered the condemnation of the Father, the judgment that we deserved, he took upon himself. But then, the Father accepted his sacrifice, and raised him from the dead. And so now, *we* are able to become sons and daughters of God, as well. All because of what Jesus the Son has done. We are able to be “re-born” (John 3), new creatures in Christ. It shouldn’t be this way. It’s not what we deserve. But God has made us His children.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.” And not just a symbolic naming us His children. John says, “And so we are.” We are truly God’s children. And in verse 2, he says it again, “Beloved, we are God’s children *now*.” It’s our current reality, ever since that water has washed over our heads, He has truly made us His own.

And then looking to our future, what will we be? John writes, “What we will be has not yet appeared but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him

as he is” (1:2). You will see Jesus when he appears again, and you will be raised, you shall be like the Son, and for eternity, you will know what it is like to be a son or a daughter of the Almighty God. You will be a child of God for eternity. That’s who *you* will be, because that’s who *Jesus* is.

Each day, you are becoming more and more like Jesus. You are light because Jesus is light. You are love because Jesus is love. You are forgiving because Jesus is forgiving. You are pure because Jesus is pure. You are righteous because Jesus is righteous. You are a child of God because Jesus is the Son of God. What the future holds impacts who we are today.

So, then, we consider again, “What do I want to be when I grow up?” The answer we all say, “I want to be like Jesus.”

Now, amazingly, you are the children of God. *Then*, gloriously, when he appears, you will be like Jesus. And if I may risk offense, on *that* day, you will be a joy and privilege to live with for all eternity.

Until then, until then, purify yourself “as he is pure” (3:3). John has a lot to say about our lives now until we see Jesus face to face. He says, “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness,” which means life without rules, life without God’s safe boundaries, which are for our good. “You *know*,” John continues, “you know [because you are children of God *now*] that [Jesus] appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in [Jesus] keeps on sinning; [because] no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.” God’s children do not practice sin.

But there’s a problem. *We are* still sinful, this side of the resurrection. Does John mean that if we commit a single sin, we’re out? That’s it? We’re no longer a child of God? No, after all, John writes earlier in this same letter, which are words we often say in our divine service, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [But] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:8-9).

So, what does John, what does God, say we are to do with sin? What should *you* do, child of God, when *you* see sin in your life? When you see darkness in the things that you think, say, or do that are inconsistent with Christ and with God’s children?

You confess it. And you turn away from it. You do not make a practice of sinning. You do not make sin your standard for living.

When you see anger in your life, address it. Turn away from it. When you are apathetic toward your work or your family, address it. Turn away from it. When you hold contempt toward your fellow brother or sister in Christ, address it. Turn away from it. When you are not faithful in your attendance at church, when you catch yourself saying things that are not wholesome, when you think upon things that are not healthy, when you look at things that are harmful, when you do things that are not what children of God should be doing, address it. Turn away from it.

When you find yourself making a practice of sin, break the practice. Do not abide in sin, as if sin is ever acceptable. Confess it, turn away from it, don’t do it. And then turn it over to our Lord Jesus Christ and to his blood shed for you, and ask for his forgiveness. This is called repentance. And when you repent.... You are forgiven! Because He is faithful and just.

Repentance isn’t a one-time thing, either. As Martin Luther wrote, the Christian life is a life of repentance. You daily need to repent, to turn from sin and ask for forgiveness from God, and from those around you. If you sin against your wife, your husband, ask for forgiveness. From them and from God. If you sin against your children, your parents, ask for forgiveness. If you sin against anyone, ask for forgiveness. Our life is that of daily repentance and forgiveness. And

God will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. And you know that your fellow children of God will forgive you, too.

Once we are forgiven, we live the new life that we have in Christ. This is what it means to be children of God. And beloved, you are *now* God's children. Honor one another. Love one another. Be a joy and a privilege to live with one another starting right now. Shine his light, his love that we have been given, and that we now give to others.

And when we, the body of Christ, live as God's children, not abiding in sin, but living righteously as he is righteous, we will look more and more like the Son. And the world, who does not know the Son (3:1), will get to know him, through us. They will see our light, and come to know Christ's light. That's what it means to be the community of believers, the body of Christ, his Church. Children of God living like the children of God.

And we do that because of what we will one day be – we will be like him, because we will see him as he is. We will be raised. We will be pure. We will be righteous, because he is. And we will be like him.

Confirmands, what will you be when you grow up? Brothers and sisters in Christ, what will you be when you grow up? You will be God's children. And you *are* God's children, right now. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. And when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.