

Children of God

A Sermon Preached at Calvary Episcopal Church in Flemington, New Jersey
By Father William Thiele on the 3rd Sunday of Easter, April 14th, 2024

Blessed John said, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God." +

On Easter morning Jesus gave Mary Magdalene a message for the disciples in which he called them his brothers. Easter confirmed that they and we are his family. In today's text, John affirms that we really are "children of God." John is serious, including in just three verses passed our reading where he calls others "children of the devil."

That implies two human families, one evil that ends poorly, and one blessed that ends well. Jesus warned not to judge who belongs to which one.

The creator God made us that we should be his children, part of his family. The original idea was that thinking humans would have a relationship with the Lord and with each other.

Unfortunately our thinking became messed up. We violated, and continue to violate, our relationship with the Lord and with each other. Lord God dug deep into his love in order to provide a remedy in the sending of his son Jesus.

John wrote, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God." Jesus' birth through Mary, his great teaching and healing, his calling and nurturing of his disciples and his passion on the Holy Cross show us God's serious love and adoption. Even just as he was about to die, he interceded for his executioners and commended Mary, his mother, to John's care.

When the risen Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene he gave her this message for his disciples, "Go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." John 20.

The terms are, "my brethren," "my Father and

Year B, Easter 3:

The Holy Gospel Luke 24:36b-48

While the disciples were telling how they had seen Jesus risen from the dead, Jesus himself stood among them. But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have." And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

Epistle 1 John 3:1-7

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Every one who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous.

First Lesson Acts 3:12-19

And when Peter saw it he addressed the people, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

your Father” and “my God and your God.” They and we are being welcomed to the family, as “children of God.” In Jesus’ the true humanity we are his brothers and sisters, but as to his divinity we are also sons and daughters of the Godhead.

This text embraces Jesus being both human and divine. His humanity is an ongoing theme from his being in the line of David to at his baptism being proclaimed by God, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”

Jesus’ eternal divinity is also an ongoing theme, from his work in the creation of the world that we read that begins John’s Gospel to his triumph that was revealed to John in the Book of Revelation.

By means of faith in the incredible loving gift of God to send his son, we can take our places as part of the Lord’s family.

But families can get complicated. Christian behavior ranges from beautifully devout, to squabbling or even complacent.

One of my previous bishops, would speak about one becoming so peripherally Christian as to live as a “functional atheist.” Others have asked, “If you were charged with the crime of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

We need to care about family, including our heavenly family, and act like it. Many continue to be martyred for it. Pray that such persecution will not come here. The increasing disdain for Christians and for divine principles is getting ugly, but God’s love and Heaven are beautiful.

John knew about all that. He was the only apostle who was not martyred, but the Romans tried to do it. Traditions say that after failing to kill him at Rome’s Latin Gate with boiling oil, they exiled him to the Isle of Patmos to get him out of sight. While in exile there, God gave him the visions to write the Book of Revelation.

Luke 20 tells about the Sadducees, who didn’t believe in an afterlife or resurrection. In one of their failed attempts to trip up Jesus they used a silly story about seven brothers serially having the same wife. They asked, “In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be?” Jesus told them marriage is not a state in Heaven, and said, “**They are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.**”

Paul used that “children of God term” at least a half dozen times, like in Gal. 3:26, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Or in Rom. 8:16, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”

The term seems universally compatible with all the apostles, fathers of the Church and sound traditions, but it may be John himself, “the disciple that Jesus loved,” who seems to say it best.

The most quoted example may be from John’s gospel, John 1:12, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons (children) of God, *even* to them that believe on his name.”

I particularly like a passage from today’s epistle, 1John 3:2, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

From whatever passages we claim the promise that we can be God’s children by faith, it’s centrally important that we live into the privilege of being part of the Lord’s family. This is a high and blessed vocation that calls us to live in thanks for God’s love.

John wrote, “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God.” He punctuates that saying, “And so we are.” May we live out that love and relationship, including here at Calvary Church. AMEN +