

Love One Another

1 John 3:1-7

¹ See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

Last week the Sunday School class finished a series of lessons on the Andy Griffith Show. The last lesson was about acceptance and showing love to strangers. In the episode a man from England was visiting in the Mayberry area and had an accident. Because he was at fault he needed to work off his fine and the cost of the repairs to the other man's vehicle. Barney's first reaction was that he was a foreigner and therefore a trouble-maker. However, our scripture has a very different attitude about differences. In fact, John tells us that we are all children of God and therefore we are to accept and love one another.

"Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth," the familiar words of Psalm 100, invite the people to pray and praise God from all of the lands on all of the earth. This ancient call to worship is a familiar invitation for those who would have a relationship with God and with one another, from all of the lands in all of the places on the earth where it is possible to make a noise of faithful celebration. In 1 John 3, the early church is reminded, "we are God's children now." This is a gentle reminder of an ancient connection of one human to others in all of the lands, in all of the places on the earth. In the Gospels, followers of Jesus are invited into a new

sense of family and relationship. In Jesus, we are all invited to be one family—we are all related, brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

Families constitute a difficult and confusing set of relationships. Family trees and genetic research work at making sense of blood relationships, historical connections, marriages, and children born of partnering that did not have the blessing of marriage. Even now, with very advanced technology, researchers work at making sense of birth order and history. The progeny of a head of household are counted, records are made of the branches of family names. The text says that "we should be called children of God." Our new family name is "child of God." It is the name for all of us, from all lands. The struggles that communities and cultures, races and ethnicities, towns and neighborhoods have with the outsider are corrected in this text, pushing our relationships past the familiar and easy, to include people whom we have not recognized as family. Through the ages and generations women and men have sought to define and prescribe determinative relations and relationships. The gospel gives us a way to be in relationship with the people we do not know as well as the people we do know—"we are God's children now." It is not easy.

In human families, we are given blood relationship with those to whom we are assigned. We are named by the heads of our households and expected to maintain lifelong relationships with them. In our church families, it is God who is the head of the family, redeeming us from sin and lawlessness. Abiding in God is setting up a new kind of family relationship, a different way of connecting, a way that is suggested in the call to all the lands in Psalm 100. But now we are putting away our bloodlines and living as "little children" in the household of God, as people, humans, nations connected by ties that we no longer define.

The image of little children is most compelling. They live and work and play together with a good deal of energy. In schoolyards and playgrounds, children

negotiate, speak out, tug at one another, tease, create teams, and compete. They share lunches and games and stories and tall tales. Their work is to learn to live amid the crowded ways of creating relationships, attending to instruction, investigating the natural world, believing, and questioning. New relationships require work and energy and seamless connection. The children of God still work out their relationships, with energy and commitment and patience and intensity. Play is called to mind, but so are determination and reluctant but persuasive compromise to work together to do away with ire, evil, and even sin. If the children of God work together as extended, connected set of beings, there will be, then, the motivation to pursue a goodness, a purity in all of life and with all of the people.

Certainly we cannot idealize the daily tasks of children at play as the perfect way to be in relationship. But the text encourages us to understand one another as children, people committed to being together with a kind of working innocence. Children work at giving in to one another, embodying a newness of life and spirit that is often long gone by maturity. Children want to be good. They want to be loved, and they want to be in good relationships. Children of God do not want to sin or do evil. Children of God want to please one another, and, in so doing, to please God.

The most difficult part of this passage is working to open minds to a central kind of relationship that does not define itself by difference. In this text, cooperation is the goal; difference in name and culture and place is a distraction to the goal of right relationship. Children of God attend to right relationships. In the early church, people formed tight communities based on their faith in Jesus. It was the idea of withdrawing from the bigger world to live together in these shared communities in a sense of right relationships based on the life and work of Jesus Christ. These new tight units, though drawn away from the larger world, drew in

all kinds of people who wanted to understand and live in the world, a hugely diverse world defined by the power of the Spirit that brought them together. Our job is to work at this sense of relationship one to another, and sometimes that makes us go back to start over.

Think, then, of your children or of your own childhood. Remember group play. Try to imagine yourself working very hard at being understood. Try to think of the importance of being heard clearly. Remember the power of discovery as children participate in a world they create. Think of how important it was to include everyone, to make a place for those standing outside of the circle. Think of the hard work of children. This text is about beginnings. We are called to start fresh, with one another and under the guardianship of the most powerful Caretaker.

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Most of you know that I work for Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit, a not-for-profit organization founded to help people with barriers to live to their fullest potential, and if that mean a job, we help them with that as well. My job reminds me every day that we are fellow “children of God”...to be respected and loved!

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