

SEE THE FATHER'S LOVE
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday of Easter, 2021
1 John 3:1-7

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading from before, 1 John 3:1-7: ¹ **See what great love the Father has given to us, that we are called “the children of God”! That is what we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it has not known Him.** ² **Dearly loved people, we are now the children of God, but it has not yet been shown what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.**

³ **Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.** ⁴ **Everyone who keeps on committing sin also keeps on committing lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.** ⁵ **You also know that He appeared to take away our sins, and there is no sin in Him.** ⁶ **No one who remains in Him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has seen Him or known Him.** ⁷ **Little children, let no one lead you astray! Whoever does what is right is righteous, as He is righteous.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

John had been present with the eleven and those with them in Jerusalem when the two disciples who had been on the road to Emmaus returned after their marvellous run-in with the resurrected Jesus. Having returned to Jerusalem, they searched out the disciple's meeting place and passed on to them the astonishing news. Like all those around him, John's mind must have been filled with wonder and hope as the men described how the risen Lord Jesus had made known to them how necessary it was for Him to suffer and die and rise again. The two related what had happened on the road and how they had recognised Jesus when He was breaking the bread.¹ But John must also have had *a growing hope* that had begun when the women returned from the empty tomb earlier that day. After running out to the tomb, he and Peter had witnessed with their own eyes that the tomb was indeed empty. Now that the men who had left for Emmaus returned with such fervour and excitement, John must have been getting excited himself.

Then it happened: Jesus stood among them and said, *“Peace to you!”* (Luke 24:36). As Jesus showed them various signs and taught them, John and the others were *“overwhelmed with joy”* (Luke 24:41). Then Jesus let them know that all that He went through had to happen. John would later remember, understand, and relay to us that everything Jesus suffered and endured sprang forth from the Father's love. It happened because *“God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son”* (John 3:16). Using the Scriptures, Jesus explained the Father's love and purpose to John and the others: *“These are the very words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, namely, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.* ⁴⁵ *Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.* ⁴⁶ *He told them, “This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,’* ⁴⁷ *and, based on His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* ⁴⁸ *You will testify to these things”* (Luke 24:44-48).

Jesus relayed to John and the others that the Father's love was made complete in the death and resurrection of Jesus. He let the disciples know that this love is known to us through the forgiveness of sins that Jesus' work has earned. Yet, a person may still ask, *“How do I get this forgiveness of sins, this love of the Father, that Jesus has earned for me?”*

John answered this question in his record of the Good News. In his Gospel account, John recorded Jesus' conversation with a man named Nicodemus, who had secretly desired to know more about what Jesus was teaching. In this conversation, Jesus repeatedly reminded Nicodemus of baptism - perhaps hinting that Nicodemus's Pharisee brethren had previously rejected John the Baptist's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.² Jesus told Nicodemus, *“unless anyone is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* Again, Jesus told him, *“unless anyone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* And finally, Jesus said, *“Do not be*

¹ Luke 24:35

² Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; see 7:30.

astonished that I have told you, 'You people must be born from above!'"³ Jesus continued to teach that the baptism we receive has its source in the Father's love, which springs forth from the lifting up of the Son of Man on the cross. All who receive this love of the Father in baptism are saved from condemnation and eternal death.⁴ The Apostle Peter also writes that baptism now saves, "*not by washing dirt from the body but by guaranteeing a good conscience before God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*" (1 Peter 3:21). Through baptism we are joined to Christ's death and resurrection and continue to walk in newness of life. This is done by daily sorrow for sin and faith in Jesus Christ. Of course, one can be baptised and still be lost. While it is true that God's promises in baptism stand even if we do not believe them, all who reject God's promises to them and die in unbelief have abandoned baptism and do not receive what God has promised, namely the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. They are lost entirely of their own doing.

God loves us with a love that is completely undeserved; it cannot be earned. Out of love, the Father has sent His beloved Son to die in our place. Love has caused Jesus to suffer, bleed, and be buried for us! And everyone who receives this love of God in baptism is made into a child of God.⁵ Jesus continues to call people into His kingdom today through the same waters of baptism, just as he called Nicodemus. Even though we were born in sin, God wills to make us born again. On account of His great love, He wills to turn sinners like you and me into His children.

All of this leads John to write in our text, "**See what great love the Father has given to us, that we are called "the children of God"! That is what we are.**" When we first entered this world, it was as God's enemies. God had other adjectives to describe our first status - foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved. The dominant emotions that govern the lives of sinful rebels are malice, envy, and hatred, says Paul in Titus 3:3. But look at what Jesus has gone through to make us His own! The season of Lent followed that love all the way to the cross and the sealed tomb. Three days later, we found that God's love did not let us down, for God's love is alive! And when we were baptised, that love was united to us. Again, this love makes you and me into God's children! What a great fear and doubt destroyer it is to be God's children! This is not a patronising term - the point is not to make us feel little, like babies. The point is to make us feel loved, important, and secure. God the Father has solemnly obligated Himself to do for us what all good fathers do for their children - provide for our daily needs, protection, and guidance. He provides us with a sense of being worth something, of being precious. He is there for us in emergencies, just as good fathers bail their children out of trouble. When we need help, when we pray, we don't have to feel as though we are approaching a stranger. We are talking to our Father! We can call on a relationship that He has initiated - it was His idea, His doing, His adoption, not ours. He stooped down to us since we couldn't climb up to Him.

This love of the Father sets us apart from the world around us. "**The reason why the world does not know us is that it has not known Him**" John writes. We no longer find our identity in the things of this perishing world. By virtue of our baptism, we bear our heavenly Father's name, and our identity is found in His love. We no longer live our lives seeking to fulfil the desires of our hearts. Like Jesus, the one who has set us free, our desire is now to do the Father's will. And what is His will? His will is to continue to love the world through His Son. And this love is made known through the Word of God that we share with others as it is shared with us.

We live our lives abiding in Jesus' love. We do this by receiving His Word. We receive His love through the Word heard in preaching and the absolution. We receive His love as we read His Word throughout the week. We receive His love as we eat and drink His Supper. Through all of these things, we live as God's baptised, born-again children. And this love in which we live is not for us alone. The Father's love sanctifies us and causes us to live our lives so that our neighbour would know God's love as well.

As God's children, we are quick to confess when we have sinned against God and other people. By God's grace, we agree with His Word and recognise that His Law is there because He lovingly desires to protect our neighbour and us. So we confess when we break God's Law. And as God's children, we are quick to forgive when others sin against us. We do this because we know and understand that God's great love caused Jesus to die for our sins. We know God's love transformed us from sinners, who were objects of God's wrath, into His beloved children. We love others because God in Christ first loved and continues to love us.⁶

³ John 3:3-7

⁴ John 3:12-17

⁵ John 1:12-13

⁶ 1 John 4:19

That is the miracle of Easter. God's love that has given Jesus to die and then raised Him again takes hopeless sinners and gives them hope, living in His love. It is truly hard to believe, and that's why John calls us to reflect on this miraculous truth over and over again. John's life was transformed by the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection. It enabled him to "**see what great love the Father has given to us.**"

God's love in Christ's death and resurrection was united to John in his baptism, and his identity was wrapped up in God's love for him. In the writing of his Gospel account, John even refers to himself as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*"⁷ As a witness of God's love for the world, John couldn't help but eagerly persuade us to believe that this love, which he witnessed, is also ours. "**See what great love the Father has given to us, that we,**" even sinners like you and me, "**are called "the children of God"! That is what we are.**" Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have sent Your Son into the world, not to be served, but to serve and to give His life to redeem all people. After He had offered His life as the one sacrifice for all sins for ever, You raised Him from the dead by Your glorious power. Give us a living faith in Him, so that we may possess the sure hope of eternal life through Him. We thank You for all Your kindness in our lives. Do not let us forget that every good gift comes from You.

We thank You for taking away the darkness of our minds and spirits, and for revealing to us Your Word of truth in Jesus Christ. Pour out Your Spirit on us, that He may keep us spiritually alive through Your Word in our hearts. Give us deeper understanding of Your truth, and of Your great love for us.

We thank You for the fellowship of believers that we have in Your church. Protect your church from enemies without, and keep us all in the unity that the Spirit gives. Prevent disunity, party spirit, and discord from giving Satan a foothold among us. Keep us all in Christ Jesus by faith and joyful obedience, and in loyalty to Your infallible Word. Shower Your blessings upon Your Church everywhere, and give it success in all Your work.

Give us opportunities to tell the Gospel to others who need to hear it, and give us the wisdom and the courage to use them. Enable us to draw people into Your Word, through which Your Spirit works faith, and fill us with the message of Jesus' resurrection and the ability to tell it forth.

We thank You for giving us Christian homes. Surround every family with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that love, peace, forgiveness, comfort, joy, and moral purity may fill our lives.

We thank You, Lord, for the blessings we enjoy in our rich land. Defend it, both within and without, from all who would harm it by sin, undermine it by strife and rebellion, or destroy it by war.

We thank You, O Father, for the gifts of our daily bread, for health and healing, education and social joys, friends and companions, and all the beauties and wonders of Your creation. Give us weather that is appropriate for our needs. Alongside all the blessings that you give us daily and richly, give us, as well, joyful and thankful hearts, and the willingness to use what You give us to serve You.

We commend to Your gracious care those among us who are ill, lonely, or depressed. Comfort them with the good news of their redemption and the hope of life eternal through Jesus' sacrificial death and glorious resurrection.

Surround us with Your love, and finally receive us into perfect, unbroken fellowship with You and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Hear the prayers we bring You in His precious name. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 3:11-21

11 As the man clung to Peter and John, all the people came running together to them at the porch that is called "Solomon's," greatly amazed.

¹² When Peter saw the people, he responded to them, "Men of Israel, why are you wondering about this or why are you looking intently at us, as though we had made him walk by our own power or piety? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you

⁷ John 13:23

handed over and denied before Pilate when he had decided to release Him. ¹⁴ You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you. ¹⁵ You killed the Author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in His name, His name has made this man, whom you see and know, strong. The faith that comes through Him has given him this perfect health in front of all of you.

¹⁷ “Yet now, fellow Jews, I know that you have acted in ignorance, as your rulers have also done. ¹⁸ However, in this way God has fulfilled what He had foretold by the mouths of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent, therefore, and turn to God, that your sins may be wiped away, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that He may send the Christ, whom He has previously appointed for you, namely, Jesus! ²¹ Heaven must receive Him until the times when everything is restored, as God has promised since the world began by the mouths of His holy prophets.

1 John 3:1-7

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³ Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. ⁴ Everyone who keeps on committing sin also keeps on committing lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You also know that He appeared to take away our sins, and there is no sin in Him. ⁶ No one who remains in Him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has seen Him or known Him. ⁷ Little children, let no one lead you astray! Whoever does what is right is righteous, as He is righteous.

Luke 24:36-49

³⁶ While they were talking about what had happened, Jesus stood among them. He said to them, “Peace to you!”

³⁷ They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He asked them, “Why are you troubled? Why do doubts come into your minds?”

³⁹ Look at My hands and My feet! It is I Myself. Feel Me and see! A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see Me have.”

⁴⁰ After He said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.

⁴¹ While they were still so overwhelmed with joy that they could not believe it, He asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?”

⁴² They gave Him a piece of broiled fish. ⁴³ He took it and ate it while they watched Him.

⁴⁴ He told them, “These are the very words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, namely, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and, based on His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’ ⁴⁸ You will testify to these things.

⁴⁹ “I am sending you what My Father has promised. Wait here in the city until you are armed with power from above!”