

Children of God
Third Sunday of Easter - Year B - 04/18/2021
Psalm Reading: 4
1st Reading: Luke 24: 36b-48, 2nd: 1 John 3:1-7

I think, as Christians, it is an established fact that God loves us. And there are so many proofs of this. God made us in a wonderful manner that reflects God's glorious image. God surrounded us with good things, a beautiful planet abounding with food and water. God gave us a purpose, to live, to discover, to be in relation with God and with each other. God also gave us Jesus Christ to be an example, and through his sacrifice atoned for our sin. We cannot deny the love of God. And this love is so powerful that we are called "Children of God."

We, the followers of Christ are often called children of God in the Bible. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John (1:12, NIV), the evangelist, the "one Jesus loved" wrote, "...to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." In the Old Testament God often tells the Israelites to call God, "Father". (Jer. 3:19, Isa. 64:8) And so we come to understand that there is a close relationship between us and God and that relationship is of a familial nature.

There are many implications of this relationship that surely include the idea that Jesus is our elder brother, and that we are inheritors to the kingdom of God, and will follow in the footsteps of Jesus and ultimately be welcomed into the arms of the father. John, in this letter made clear that we cannot know

exactly what this will look like. He wrote, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him.” (v.2) Risen and accepted by God.

But there is another aspect to being a “Child of God” that we do not always think about. If we are all children of God. Doesn’t that make us all siblings of one another? Sisters and brothers in Christ?

When I was a boy, my father was in the Air Force, and because of that we moved every two or three years from one Air Force Base to another. There were four children in the family. I am the eldest, and I was born in Bangor Maine along with two of my siblings. I still have dim recollections of that time, helping my father wash a car using a squirt gun on a hub cap while he used a hose. I remember walking along in the early spring sunshine beside a red wagon that contained my brother and my sister, as my Mom hauled it along, headed downtown, no doubt to buy a few groceries while my Dad was at work. We were a tight-knit little family group, always together, always taking each other into account when we did anything.

When I was going on four years old, we moved to Newfoundland, Canada, where there was another ubiquitous Air Force Base, containing planes, hangers and runways, all sitting in the stark Newfoundland countryside. I remember flying in to the Air Base with my Mom, my brother, and my sister. My Dad picked us up and drove us out to where we would live for the next three years. It was a thirty-six foot long, eight-foot wide trailer house. I will tell you that the quarters were quite cramped. Not that we children really knew anything

different. We would run from one end of the place to the other in reckless abandon. But, the bathroom was a tiny space, and I can remember it getting so cold in the winter that we would sleep under a stack of military issue “picker-blankets” and Mom would turn on the oven and open the door in the morning to warm the place up so that my Dad could get ready for work in a degree of comfort.

My siblings and I were inevitably close, we had to share everything, especially the space...and then, the inevitable happened. One day Mom and Dad went off to the hospital. Dad took a few days of leave to watch us, and then, they brought home to us a little baby girl. Well, they had told us this was coming, but the reality of having another sibling, and this one a baby, created a whole new paradigm in the house. Because you know that little girl, being a baby and all, absorbed a tremendous amount of resources and attention. I mean, her crib took a big hunk out of the already small bedroom my brother and I shared with my sister, and of course my mom was attending to her constantly, we others felt like we never got our share of attention.

So, I think we three elder children might have been a little resentful at first. But my mother explained to us all how she loved us all the same, and how this new little girl, was one of our little group of siblings, she was our sister, and for now we had to sacrifice for her sake until she could take her full place in the family. And, of course, we did as our mother told us. Although, one of our favorite things to do was to lay the older sister’s doll next to the baby to measure her growth and look forward to the time when she would not have to sleep in that

giant crib that took up so much space in the bedroom. I think it took her a year and half before she got taller than the doll. My sister was small and the doll was pretty big.

So, having the same God, and being children of the same God, makes us all brother and sister to each other, the way my siblings and me were. We became pretty close, not just because we shared the same genetic material, but I think partly because we moved so often, and we really only had each other as regular friends for the remainder of our childhood. Also, we shared the same upbringing, if not always the same beliefs throughout our childhood and on into adulthood.

The implications of being siblings with other Christians, and with the rest of humanity for that matter, is profound. I think it begins, actually, in our own church. This is a close community where we form close relationships. So it is not always easy to let in someone new. But we are all brothers and sisters in Christ and so we should accept new members into the fold as equal partners in God's grace, in Christ's sacrifice, and also in the life of the church.

We are, indeed, a warm and welcoming church, but I think sometimes we get so used to thinking of the same people in certain groups or leadership positions that we neglect someone who is new. It is well-known that people are more likely to feel welcome to a church where they are quickly integrated into the familial structure, the sooner they become involved in what is going on the better for them and the better for us as a group.

Now, the time will come when we will have live services again. When this happens we should be aware of visitors and we certainly should make anyone who comes into the church

feel welcome. And when someone crowds the little space we have carved out for ourselves in the pews we have to be understanding and know that the important thing is not where you sit, but that you come and be in the church. (It is not as if it is a giant crib crowding your personal space in your bedroom.) Know that every pew is equally comfortable. I should note that we are pretty good at making visitors feel welcome, but I think it bears repeating that we should be doing this intentionally. And it is something we can all do, before and after services, and especially during fellowship time. Just remember that everyone is your sister or brother.

Of course, we have more siblings in the community. We can view people in other denominations as our brothers and sisters as well. And we do work in an ecumenical way with others, especially during Lent. And we will continue to find ways to work with others in the future. Of course, there are local organizations that we work with as well. Habitat for Humanity, Partners in Prevention, and Heart and Soul are three groups that we currently house in our building. We also provide space for Yoga classes, music lessons, and a weight loss group. Through the generosity of past members and the Besser Foundation we have a beautiful space that we can share with others.

Then we have to remember that we are part of a bigger group of sisters and brothers, with the Presbytery we are part of a group through which we can coordinate outreach efforts and missions as well as access resources that can make us a better church. We meet at meetings three times a year and

we have members who regularly attend those meetings, just ask Scott Edgar about what goes on there.

Of course, we have brothers and sisters around the world. Christianity is on every continent and we need to support Christians everywhere, especially in places where there is persecution and violence.

I do not want to leave out all of those who are not part of the greater church, both visible and invisible, but to mention all of those who have not yet found Christ and who in this life may never come to believe. We have a responsibility to them as well, to treat them as we ourselves would wish to be treated, and to know that God loves all of humanity and so should we. These people, too, are our sisters and brothers and I don't think it would hurt them to bring a little of the Good News of the Gospel their way.

So, you see, there are a lot of implications to this passage, and it puts upon us a tremendous responsibility to love and accept the love of our sisters and brothers in this life and on into the next.

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