

1 John 2:28-3:3 “Beloved Children”  
4/25/2021 4th Sunday in Easter  
Pastoral Intern Michael Onstad

1 John 2:28-3:3 (NKJV)

**2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.**

**3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**

### Beloved Children

At some point in our lives, all of us have asked the question “who am I?” Many of us probably wrestled with this question in our adolescent and early adult years. Junior high and high school students listening, you’re perhaps wrestling with that question right now. Perhaps some of you older adults may be wrestling with it. It’s an important question to ask, and it certainly requires thought and good counsel. Maybe you answer the question by listing your personal characteristics, like your age, or your height, or your ethnicity. Perhaps you answer that question with the current job you work at, or your political affiliation. Those are not bad answers to the question “who am I,” but they are not the whole answer. You are so much more than your age, or your ethnicity, or your job, or your political beliefs. In this text from 1 John, John tells us about our primary identity. And that identity is that **we are God’s beloved children!**

He tells us that we are made children of God by faith in Christ, and then as His children, we are to live and remain in Him. Then, when Christ returns, we will be children of God by sight as well, not just by faith.

So, how are we made children of God? We are made children of God by faith in Christ.

3:1, right there in the middle of our text, says it all. What love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God! This love that the Father has given to us is given to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:8 tells us that God demonstrates His love for us in Christ. God’s ultimate act of love toward the human race was sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die and rise again for His fallen creation.

In our fallen state, we were God’s enemies. Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent in the garden, and upon disobeying God and eating the forbidden fruit, plunged us all into sin. Through them, we inherit a sinful nature that is completely against God. In our natural, unregenerate state, we want nothing to do with God. We actively reject what He commands us to do, and only do our own thing and go our own way.

But thanks to the work of Christ on the cross, we, and you, are no longer God's enemy. As we heard last week, Christ appeased God's wrath by paying the penalty of sin, which is death, and in doing so, put us back into a right relationship with God. Then, by faith in Christ and what He has done for you, you become a child of God. By faith, your sins are forgiven, and you are born again with a new heart, which gives you new desires, and you are given the promise of eternal life.

The very moment God grants faith to you, you become a child of God. There is no "cleaning your life up" or "getting your act together" before God calls you to be His child. You are His child by faith the moment you hear the Gospel and repent and believe that Christ has forgiven your sins.

Where do you go to remind you of this glorious reality when you are overwhelmed by evil and suffering and begin to despair? There are two places, and they are connected.

The first is the Word. It's right here in our text. You are a child of God right now by faith. John says so right here in 3:1-2, and Scripture is full of comforting promises just like this. Just as the Word creates faith in us through the work of the Holy Spirit, so too does it renew our minds and comfort and assure us of the Gospel when we're in despair.

The second place to look happened just a little bit ago for little Daphne: Baptism. In Baptism, God's Word is attached to the water and brings with it glorious promises. In baptism, we are promised that we are attached to Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6), we are born again and regenerated (John 3 and Titus 3), we are given the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), and we are adopted as God's children (Romans 8:15). This is why you'll often hear the phrase "remember your Baptism" in some Lutheran circles. As mentioned before, it is meant to bring comfort to those who are despairing of their sins and doubting their status as children of God because of it. But remember that by saying that, they are being pointed to the promises given in Baptism, not simply the act itself. As the Small Catechism says, it's not the water that does such great things, but it is the Word of God attached to the water that does the work

So, because of the great love and grace given to us by God our Father, we are now called His children by faith! Praise the Lord! What does it mean, though, to be a child of God? John gives us some insight on that as well.

We are to live and remain in Him as His children. As we've been hearing throughout this series on 1 John, John is telling us what to believe and do as we live with false teachers in our midst. We are to believe in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. We are to believe that He has died and rose again for our forgiveness, and as such, we are now children of God. What are we to do as children of God? John tells us in 2:28-29 that we are to abide in him, and to practice righteousness

To "abide in him," to abide in Christ, means to continually repent and put your faith and hope in Christ for your salvation. It means to daily read and meditate on His Word, and believe it! Abiding in Christ is a daily process. And we have the promise from Christ Himself in the Gospel of John that as we abide in Him, He abides in us. As we continually repent of our sins

and turn to Christ for forgiveness and salvation, as we daily read, meditate on, and believe His Word, Christ abides in us and renews us through His Holy Spirit. As we abide in Him, the Holy Spirit encourages us to go and do good works, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit. This is how we “practice righteousness” mentioned in verse 29.

We practice righteousness by loving and serving our neighbors. Parents love and care for their children. Children listen to their parents. Students do their school work. Employees come to work and do their job well. Believers come to church and receive the ministry of the Word and the fellowship of believers in the congregation. We pray for our neighbors. We go and pray for the world and do local acts of charity and kindness to those near to us in our local community. We preach the Gospel to those in our family, and in our community. And the list goes on, and on, and on.

As we do these things, God works through those good works to provide for our neighbors. God uses parents to provide for children. He uses the congregation to preach the Gospel to the world one community at a time. He uses the careers and vocations of others to deliver food, clothing, and all the other things we need on a daily basis.

We are also showing people our faith by those works. These works do not earn our salvation, nor are they the primary way we keep ourselves in the faith. These good works certainly keep our hands from doing sinful things, but they should not be used as the chief proof of our salvation. Christ’s death and resurrection is the assurance of our salvation, and our works are simply an outpouring of the love the Father has given to us. It’s as verse 29 says, we are practicing righteousness because He, Christ, who abides in us, is righteous. As we continue to place our hope in Christ, we cannot help but go and do good works. And we do these until the glorious day of Christ’s return.

When Christ returns, we will be children of God by sight, not just by faith.

As we go about our lives as God’s children, we’ll maybe notice two things. First, we’ll find that we don’t love God or our neighbors perfectly, despite our best efforts. Secondly, we’ll find that the world doesn’t really like us.

Let’s tackle the second thing first. We don’t have to go very far to see that Christianity is under attack today. But, it’s always been under attack. It is no new thing that the truth of Christianity is not well received by the world. Why is that? Why would the world hate something so wonderful such as Christianity? John tells us in 3:1 that it’s because of whose we are. Because the world, in its sin, has not known Jesus from the beginning, they do not truly know those who are His children. Some certainly tolerate us and are appreciative of the good works that we do, but they think that Christ isn’t for them. Others revile us because they revile Christ. In their sin, they do not know the very one who loves them so much that He died to rescue them from their sin. As we encounter those people in the world, may we preach the Gospel to them! May the Lord use us as His mouthpiece to bring them to repentance and faith through His Word and make them His children, just as He used Christians in our lives to bring us to faith! May we also do

this in patience, grace, and love, remembering that we too, in our sin, are just as capable of unbelief, and that we are not perfect either.

And this brings us back to the first point. As children of God, we may notice that we don't always perfectly act like it. We'll still notice that we have sinful thoughts, that we still will let sinful words slip out, and that we still will stumble into sinful deeds. John gives us comfort in 3:2 for those of us who despair in the midst of suffering with our own sin, or persecution from the world. He reminds us that our status as God's children is based purely on the Father's love for us, not our ability to act accordingly. He also reminds us that it will not be like this forever. Christ will return, and we'll be made like Him when we see Him at His return.

John says that what we will be has not yet been fully revealed, but we know it will be when Christ returns. We are children of God by faith now, but when Christ returns and we see Him face to face, we will be made like him. The sin that so easily entangles us, the suffering and persecution that we experience, it will all be gone when that happens. Our bodies will be made pure and holy, like Christ's. We will be children of God not just by faith anymore, but by sight as well. No more sin, no more suffering, and no more death. Just eternity with God our Father, and Christ our Savior.

What better hope do we have than that? Continue to hope in that, dear children of God. Continue to hope in Christ your Savior, for that hope in Christ is the sure, certain, and eternal hope of your faith. And John tells us that this hope in Christ purifies us. This hope that we believe in allows us to continue on and do the good works that we've been created to do until Christ returns

**So remember, dear saints, that we are God's beloved children!** We are made children of God by faith in Christ, and we are to live and remain in Him as His children. Then, when Christ returns, we will be children of God by sight, not just by faith.

John's answer to the question "who am I?" is that you, dear believer, are a child of God. You are loved by God more than you could ever imagine. You are loved despite your sin, and you are loved so much that God desires to remove that sin from you. And He has done it through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. By faith in that death and resurrection, you are adopted into God's family, and given the inheritance of promises that He has promised to you. Namely, forgiven sins, eternal life by faith, a new heart, and the gift of the Holy Spirit now, and then a new body and eternal life by sight when Christ returns. So as you go and live your life assured of your status as a beloved child of God, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.