



Third Sunday of Easter

April 18, 2021

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: "Jesus Loves Me"

Arr: Douglas Smith/Mark Albrecht

Gathering

Welcome and Announcements

Lighting the Christ Candle

Acolyte: Jesus Christ is alive and among us now. Even as the light pushes back the dark, so to Jesus Christ has defeated death. Let us worship God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

* Call to Worship

Liturgist: See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

All: And that is what we are!

Liturgist: Dear friends, now we are children of God, and we know that when Christ appears we shall see him as he is.
1 John 3:1-2 adapted

All: Come Lord Jesus; come among your children today.

All Singing: 206 "Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing"
Singing verses 1, 2, 3, and 5

God's Greeting
God's People Greeting One Another

Reconciliation

Liturgist: The psalmist writes: Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

Minister: Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord hears when you call to him.

Liturgist: Lord, hear us as we call:

**All: Lord, have mercy on us, your children.
We have sinned and fallen short of your will.
We have turned your glory into our shame.
We have loved delusion and sought false gods.**

Liturgist: Lord, hear us as we call:

All: Search our hearts; hear us even in this silence.

Psalm 4:1-4 adapted

Silent Confession and Reflection

Minister: Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.
But we know that Jesus Christ appeared so that he might take away our sins.
And in him is no sin. *I John 3:4-5 adapted*

Liturgist: In Christ you are forgiven.

**All: Lord, let the light of your face shine on us.
Fill our hearts with joy.
For you alone make us dwell in safety.**

Psalm 4:6-8 adapted

* **All Singing: 174 "I Stand Amazed"**

Liturgist: I John 3:16-18

Proclamation

Prayer for Illumination

All Singing: 947 "Breathe on Me, Breath of God"

Scripture: I John 3:1-7

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: "And That Is What We Are!"

* **All Singing: 683 "How Great is the Love of the Father"**
Duet singing verse 1, all singing verses 2 and 3

Dedication

Prayers of the People

* **All Singing: 956 "To God Be the Glory"**

Benediction

Postlude: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"

Arr: Alice Jordan

Worship Leaders

Pianist / Vocalist: Erin Pacheco
Organist / Flutist: Lynn Hollender
Vocalist: Ginny Carpenter
Drums: Margot VanderWeele
Sound / Video: Schuyler Roozeboom
Minister: Roger Nelson

9:00 AM Service

Acolyte: Grady Kostelyk
Liturgist: Sheryl Wiers
Prayer: Kim Ottenhoff

10:15 AM Service

Acolyte: Cooper Westerveld
Liturgist: Rachel Westerveld
Prayer: Dan Quist

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)
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5825 W 151st Street, Oak Forest, IL 60452
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Text: I John 3: 1-7

Title: And that is what we are.

Date: 04.18.21

Roger Allen Nelson

I came upon a dark and shameful corner of the Christian Reformed Church. I was shaken, saddened, and I'm still troubled by it. I asked some of you about the wisdom and pastoral sensitivity of shining a light on that corner. Some things are best left in the dark. I offer this with hesitancy and I hope a measure of tenderness. I think our text moves us out of a dark corner and into an expansive light.

It turns out that the CRC had difficulty with the baptism of adopted children.

The Synod of 1908 (the gathered governing body of the denomination) appointed a committee to study the status of adopted children. In 1910 that committee reported that such children were “not in the covenant because blood relationship mattered” and that “they (could) give no actual tenable grounds for the baptism of foundlings adopted by believers.” (1910 Acts of Synod, p. 148)

Somehow their theology barred adopted children from baptism.

Somehow their theology lifted up blood over grace.

Somehow their ethnicity supplanted the gospel.

In the Synods of 1928 and 1930 they revisited the question. As one church argued, “sufficient light has been shed so that we need no longer grope in the dark....” However, while Synod said that adopted children “may” be baptized there was no consensus or clarity. They were still groping in the dark.

In 1949 Synod agreed that adopted children could be baptized but there was a one year waiting period. I think the waiting period was an effort to insure that the baptism stuck....

The fifties and sixties were a time of uncertainty and tumult. In 1963 Lew Smedes (who with Doris had 3 adopted children) wrote in the denominational magazine that the church “held tenaciously to both sides of the ambiguity: adopted children were eligible for (baptism), but had no claim upon baptism.”

Dear friends, it wasn't until 1968 that the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church overturned the previous decisions about baptizing adopted children claiming that they “bordered on superstition.”

Reggie Smith writes about it this way:

I think of the many families over the years who suffered under the heavy burden of rejection from previous synods, who suffered from culture shaping theology in a dramatic way. Insularity led to voices of theological comfort who simply confirmed their biases. They could not see the new gifts of grace, but instead saw problems to solve for theological purity.

What a tragic, shameful, and sad legacy.
How did we miss a gospel that proclaims with great joy:

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God. And that is what we are!

In our text this morning, John writes that our status as the children of God is located in the love of God. And, one reading of the word that he uses to qualify or accentuate that love suggests that the love is of another country, from another place, foreign. Our translator uses the word “lavish.”

You are a child of God because of the lavish, outlandish, love of God.

It's not a matter of wishing or waiting,
it's not earned,
it's not because of orientation or accomplishment,
it's not a function of piety,
it's not about ethnicity or theological purity,
it is wholly and solely because of God's love.

And, as Gentiles, our status as God's children is tied to adoption. The good news is that you are a child of God, adopted in Christ Jesus. Paul puts it this way:

...he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption as children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...

You are – present tense, in fact, today, right now – a child of God, adopted in Christ Jesus.

Now, as I understand it, adoption in the Hebrew/Roman world was not about compassion for orphans, but rather about inheritance and family name. And the adopted were often young people or adults. A man would be adopted to carry on the name of a childless family. That adopted son would sever ties with his old family, including relief of any debt owed under his old name, and he would, in turn, become a new person, in a new family, with a new inheritance and a new name.

John and Paul pick up that imagery and invite us to see ourselves in that light.

You belong, body and soul and in life and in death, to God through Christ. You are forgiven, freed of the debt of sin, and an inheritor of abundant life. God has claimed you and named you. And baptism is the sign and seal of this adoption....

Ronald Cole-Turner puts it this way:

Our birth certificate states our natural identity. Our baptism certificate states our true identity. By God's love, we are no longer strangers, orphans lost in the cosmos, without hope or direction except for our own imagination and self-rescue. We are loved, claimed,

and redefined as nothing less than God's children. By sheer love, we are adopted out of the social system of the world and into the family of God...

Thanks be to God.

What follows in our text is encouragement, command, and some admittedly complicated and confusing language about being without sin and becoming like Christ. It has a future-end-of-time-eschatological quality to it. This is who you are and this is who you will become. It calls us to faithfully-obediently live into who we are as the children of God.

But, there's also a shadow to this text....

Does the good news that you are a child of God suggest that there are others who are not the children of God? Does your adoption in Christ mean that there are those who aren't adopted? Are there those who are outside of the family? If evidence of being a child of God is not sinning than we're all on the outside. And yet, if there is some transformative adoption what are the boundaries? Is everyone adopted? Are only some adopted?

The truth is: I don't know.

I'll let God sort out his own family.

I'll leave the adopting to God.

It is wholly and solely God's business.

However, as a steward of this good news, as a child of God, it seems to me that I am called to proclaim, by word and deed, to everyone that I encounter, that they too are the children of God, adopted in Christ Jesus. I'm called to be generous with love and lavish with the waters of baptism. I'm not going to put parameters on the love of God, or the reach of God's adoption, or the measure of God's mercy.

As it is helpful for you to see some as other than the children of God – so be it.

But it seems to me that our calling as God's children is to proclaim, welcome, treat, encourage all people, even the vulgar and the vicious,
even the twisted and the troubled,
even you and me,
as the children of God. For that is what we are.

What will come has not yet been revealed.

If we shall be like Christ, is there not room for the other?

Here's another corner of the Christian Reformed Church....

Lavelle is a gay drug addict who worked the streets for at least twenty years. That he is still alive is a miracle to me. That he has joined the good folks at Roseland Christian Ministries for worship, Bible study, choir, and helping distribute food from the Food Pantry is a miracle to me. That he stood in the center of Hope Church and joyfully-flamboyantly sang a solo with the RCM Community Choir is a miracle to me. Thanks be to God.

The journey to healing and wholeness is not always straight. There are detours, roadblocks, and axle-breaking potholes. Lavelle's journey is fraught with trials and troubles, and a few years ago he was strung out and back on the street again.

Phil Walker is a big-big-man with an even bigger heart. I've known him since he was in elementary school. His grandmother was a dear soul and you can't be around Phil and not smile. He's also a convicted felon who did hard time for selling crack, and his mother, Tootie, was a long-time addict. Today they're both clean and straight. Phil drives a truck and Tootie recently worked in the shelter at Roseland Christian Ministries.

Phil and Tootie saw Lavelle back working the street.

Now, I know a lot of folks would shake their heads and drive by.

I know a lot of folks would turn away.

I know a lot of folks would condemn Lavelle.

But, Phil and Tootie?

They stopped their car, got out, walked over, and Phil put his arm around Lavelle and reminded him

that God loved him,

that he was a child of God,

that he belonged to Jesus and not to the street,

and they encouraged him to get back to those things that help him live into his adoption.

They saw him first as a child of God.

May we have the same grace and courage.

For....

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God. And that is what we are!

Thanks be to God.

Amen.