



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

APRIL 15, 2018
THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

A Holy Calling Luke 24:36-48; I John 3:1-3

“We should be called the children of God; and that is what we are.”

“WE should be called the children of God; and that is what WE are.”

“We SHOULD be called the children of God; and that IS what we are!”

We hear these words a lot. I use this passage a lot: at funerals, during infant dedications, in prayers and sermons and devotions. It is one of my favorites. But do I really hear and understand those words? Do you listen to them and realize the impact of what they say? “We should be called the children of God; and that is who we are.”

Of course, we cannot ignore the line which John uses to introduce this good news: “See what love the Father has given us” In other words, God loves us so much that he has made us his children. Do we have any idea of the power of those words? Do you sense the significance of what John is saying? God—the Creator of all that is, God—the Heavenly Parent, God—who holds all of life in his hands, God—who can create and have anything he desires, imaginable or unimaginable to us, claims us—you and me—as his children! Wow!!

This news places us in a very special family. I think in general, most of us are fairly satisfied with the family we get when we enter this world. Granted, there are times when those folks are not the best fit for us and we may wish that we were part of a different family. We all know those families that are so cool—the parents are fun and they do neat things all the time and all the kids want to hang out at a particular house because that seems to be the best family in the world.

Years ago, one of our church families was having a wedding and everyone involved in the ceremony was invited to the rehearsal dinner. The dinner was held at MacHaven when the City Club was still there. The dining room was elegant and the food was delicious. Toasts to the bride and groom began and were funny and touching and hopeful. Then the bride’s siblings

began making their toasts which were effusive with admiration for this young woman, tender with the kind of love brothers and sisters ought to share, and exuberant in their wishes for a bright future for the couple. As each sibling raised their glass the applause grew louder and tears flowed. It was an amazing experience. In the midst of all of this love and good wishes, the soloist turned to Deborah and me and said, "I want to be a part of this family!" We readily agreed!

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." The truth is we are already a part of the most amazing family ever—the family of God!

I think I have told you this story a couple of time before, but the best stories are best heard over and over, right? The story is told by the late Fred Craddock, preacher and professor extraordinaire.

Many years ago, Dr. Craddock and his wife were having dinner at a restaurant in Cosby, Tennessee, a little town snuggled into the Appalachian mountains. While there were eating, an elderly fellow came up and began talking and asking questions about them. It felt rude and invasive, but Dr. Craddock remained courteous. When asked his occupation, Dr. Craddock replied that he was a minister in the Christian Church and instead of taking his answer and moving on, the man sat down.

He told the Craddocks that he grew up in the mountains surrounding them but was what people called an "illegitimate child" or worse because his mother was not married. That label caused him and his mother shame and more than a few challenges in the community. People would stare at him, trying to figure out who his father was. Other kids made fun of him. He ate his lunch alone at school every day.

As a young teenager, he began visiting a little church deep in the mountains, but he was always afraid he was not welcome. He would slip in just before the sermon and then slip out quickly at the end of the service because he was afraid people would ask him questions or tell him not to return.

"One Sunday," he said, "before I could get out, I was stopped . . . I felt a hand on my shoulder, a heavy hand. It was that minister . . . He turned his face around so he could see mine and seemed to be staring for a little while. I knew what he was doing. He was going to make a guess as to who my

father was. A moment later he said, 'Well, boy, you're a child of. . .' and he paused there . . . He said, 'Boy, you're a child of God. I see a striking resemblance, boy.' Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, 'Now, you go claim your inheritance.' I left the building a different person. In fact, that was really the beginning of my life." As it turned out, the man was Ben Hooper, twice elected as the Governor of Tennessee.¹

Sometimes we do not act as if other people are also children of God. We do not treat them as kinfolk. Sometimes we do not even treat them like humans, but the experience of Ben Hooper reminds us that anyone, looking at our face, studying our features, and observing our lives ought to be able to conclude immediately, "You're a child of God. I see a striking resemblance." And we should do the same with one another as well.

"We should be called the children of God; and that is what we are." People ought to call us a child of God because that is who we are. Just as I am known back home as a child of Jean and Frank, I also ought to be known as a child of God. I wonder, however, if identifying us as children of God is all that this verse means. I wonder if it is not also a calling in the sense of being an invitation to a vocation in much the same way we say someone is called to be a minister or a missionary or a teacher or bank teller or car salesman or business owner or clerk or any of the thousands of other things God equips us to do in life. Perhaps we are called to be a child of God in the sense of making that identity our purpose in life. We are God's children by virtue of creation and God's claim on us, so we also ought to understand this way of being in the world as our spiritual vocation. We are called to be the children of God.

Beginning today, the Down East Partnership for Children celebrates what it calls "The Week of the Young Child." There are fun and educational events scheduled for each day as the Partnership reminds our community of how special our youngest citizens are and how much they need our love and support. Their primary goal is to enable all children to be able to read by grade three because that ability alone is key to graduation from high school and the opportunity for a healthy and successful life in general. However, the Partnership does much more than support reading skills. They provide parent support and training. They offer guidelines and classes in healthy eating and lifestyles. They teach children how to relate to one another in positive ways.

¹Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, Mike Graves and Richard F. Ward, eds., (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 156-157.

They encourage involvement in community groups and churches. They know that one of the factors in having a good, healthy life is having a good, healthy childhood.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples following his resurrection, they thought they were seeing a ghost which was understandable since he kept appearing in rooms with locked doors. To convince them that he was still flesh and blood, he asked for something to eat. He showed them his hands and his side. He reminded them that he was God Incarnate, flesh and blood just like they were.

Our calling as children of God is to remind the world that God understands our lives, knows our bodies, and cares about what happens to us. Too easily, the Church can perch itself above the community, calling it to the higher virtues of life, while ignoring the daily needs of the people around it. Jesus continually reminds us that God cares about the physicality of life as much as he does the spirituality of life. We are called to attend to the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual needs of all of God's children.

In order to do that well, we must listen to our children. If we listen carefully and often, we will be able to trust what they tell us about their needs. Granted, most children feign illness at some time to avoid a test at school or a bully at the street corner. If we listen and pay attention, however, our children will know we care and will let us know what they really need, whether that is intervention or simply understanding and support.

Our calling is to love the children of the world as God loves us. We ought to listen to their worries and fears as well as to their dreams and hopes. I have been astounded at the courage of young people throughout this country to let us know how frightening it can be today to go to school. I am amazed at the insight they have into their own lives and the insight they have into our lives. We need to listen to our children as they teach us how to better live in this world and how to make our world a safer place for one another. Our calling is to listen and learn from our children.

Our calling is to love the children of the world as God loves us. That means that we have to pay attention to all of the ways God relates to us. Certainly God expects a lot from us and insists that we live in honest, healthy ways with one another. God also treats us with kindness and understanding, with acceptance and forgiveness. As we try to work out our problems in the world, we need to find ways to see God's image in the face of people who are

our adversaries. We need to find God's image within ourselves. Recognizing that any conflict is a conflict within the family ought to help us find ways to work out our differences.

Our calling is to love the children of the world as God loves us. That means that our decisions as individuals, as a community, as a nation, and as a world ought to be based to some degree on how what we do affects our children. If we have any hope for our future, we cannot ignore the impact of our decisions on the people who will own that future.

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” God came in Christ as a child in order to experience our life. God lived as one of us in order to teach us how best to live. God died and rose to life in order to demonstrate his great love for us and to call us to love one another. God claims us as his children and longs for us to recognize our sisters and brothers sitting next to us and those who are scattered all over the world. We are called the children of God because we are. We are called to be the children of God and to look out for one another because of whose we are. Thanks be to God! Amen.

April 15, 2018

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Holy and Gracious God, who came to us as a helpless infant, who welcomed and blessed little ones, and who loves and nurtures us as our heavenly Parent, you have called us to have a child-like faith and trust in you and to make ourselves vulnerable to life in community with one another, but teach us, we pray, to avoid being simplistic or childish in the ways we live out our faith in this world. You have given us immeasurable blessings and have charged us to be good stewards of those resources, and among the greatest and most precious of these gifts and responsibilities are our children. You have given us their laughter, their love, their trust, and you have asked that we protect and teach them and provide a good example for them to follow. We thank you for the promise of these young lives that motivate and inspire us and give us hope for the future. Forgive us when we fail them and you. Make us truly grateful for these extraordinary blessings and for every good gift which comes from you.

O Lord, as we celebrate the delight and innocence of childhood, we grieve that so many children live with trust that has been violated and little reason to rejoice. Too many children are victims of abuse and violence, drugs and poverty and neglect. Even in our land of opportunity and prosperity, we have yet to achieve a society that protects and nurtures families, that educates our children to prepare them for the future, that promotes peace and dignity for all. We lift up to you, O Lord, those children who, even now, are hurting and forgotten, poor and hungry, lonely and desperate. Help us to meet these needs by being tireless in our work, courageous in our stands, obedient in our service, and faithful in our prayers, that our children might discover their gifts and have the opportunity to fulfill their purposes in your kingdom for generations to come. Make us unwavering in our determination and creative in our vision, not only that we might address the needs in our community and our world, but also that our children might see your image reflected in our lives. In the name of Jesus the Christ and by the power of your Holy Spirit we make our prayer. Amen.

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