

The theme is 'Children of God'.

In verse 1 of our reading, St John wrote, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; for that is what we are."

Before we move on, I just want you to imagine that you are a penniless orphan, not knowing where the next meal is coming from, we've all seen the upsetting pictures of abandoned children living on the streets on our televisions, and that one day an exceedingly kind rich man adopts you as his son or daughter, and that his own son welcomes you into your new home with open arms; that is what God has done through the wonder and depth of his love for us.

Jesus is God's natural Son, and we are God's sons and daughters by adoption. This does not mean that we are second class sons or daughters of God, not at all. As an adopted son or daughter, we have the same rights and privileges as the son.

A mother who had a natural son and an adopted son was asked one day which of her two sons was the adopted son; she replied, "I cannot remember."

St Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians chapter 3 verse 26 these words, "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith." We are not God's children by our own choice nor by our own merits, but by God's grace and love for us.

St Paul also wrote to the Romans in chapter 8 verses 14 to 17 these words. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption." And St Paul goes on to say, "When we cry 'Abba! Father' it is the very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ."

The most significant part of that last sentence is the phrase, "Joint heirs with Christ", because that confirms that God has accepted us as sons and daughters, and if anyone were to ask him who was his natural child and who was an adopted child he would, like the woman with one adopted son and one natural son, reply, "I can't remember."

In the second part of verse 1 John goes on to say, "The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."

I have three daughters, two sons in law, and four grandchildren. and I love them all, but most of you do not know them, most of you have not even seen them, so how can you know them and love them.

In the same way the world does not know us because we are God's children and they do not know God let alone his children.

Verse 2 speaks of things to come, John wrote, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed."

When I saw my children as babies the thought often went through my mind of what they would achieve when they grew up. I have to say that I have been amazed and humbled by them in the life they now lead and in the work that they do, and I am sure that many of you can say the same thing about your children now that they are adults.

I often used to think of Martin Luther King's parents, who at his baptism, would not have known that one day their little boy would help change the hearts and minds of the entire American people in relation to the black Americans.

But John goes on to say, "What we do know is this: when he is revealed to us, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." In 1 Corinthians 13 verse 12 St Paul wrote, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face."

In John's day mirrors were polished brass or bronze and the reflected image was very poor compared to our glass mirrors, so people in those days had never seen a perfect image of themselves, so the phrase, 'see in the mirror dimly', meant more to them than it does to us.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his first letter at chapter 2 verse 9 these words, "But as it is written, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."

Let us look at that statement in a bit more detail, first "What no eye has seen."

I am confident that we have all stood and admired the beautiful scenery around us or seen the beauty of innocence in the face of a child, but St Paul is saying that whatever beautiful things we have seen, nothing will compare with the beauty that will be revealed to us.

Similarly, "Nor ear heard." Again, we have all heard the beautiful sounds of the birds, and of the beautiful music played in this church by our organist, but St Paul is again saying, 'You haven't heard anything yet', because we have no concept of what God has prepared for us who love him.

However, we do have a glimpse of what it will be like, because Jesus is the embodiment of the future reality that we will inherit; at Easter God made it clear that Jesus was and is God's gift to us, and that imitating Christ will bring us to the future that St. John promises for those who love him.

The disciple John wrote in verse 3 of our reading, "And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." Hope is an important emotion which generates action, for example, I hoped to go and see my youngest daughter at Easter time with whom, in this new reality, I bubble with, and because it was my hope, I prepared for it, by agreeing with John our rector that I would not be available on Easter Sunday.

In the same way we must try and prepare ourselves to meet and stand before Christ on our judgement day, and as a part of that preparation we are to purify ourselves as he is pure. However, as we all know, to be like Jesus in this life is impossible, but nevertheless we can all strive to do our best in the knowledge that when we stand before Christ, he will complete the process for us.

There is a change in John's letter from verse 4 to 6 which deals with sin. Verse 4 to 6 reads, "Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him."

I struggled with verses 4 to 6 because it implies that I've neither seen Christ nor ever known him because of my sins, but that for me is not the right interpretation of these verses.

To get a better understanding of what John meant I am going to quote from the beginning of John's letter where in chapter 1 verse 8 he wrote.

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." Here John admits that everybody is a sinner, so how do we reconcile that with verses 4 to 6.

There is, I believe, a difference between the isolated act of sinning for which we repent, and endeavour not to do again, and for which John acknowledges in chapter 1 of his letter just read out, and the settled persistent act of sinning and lawlessness without a thought or care for anyone or anything. I do not think that John is saying that occasional or inadvertent sin for which we repent, is what John is talking about in verses 4 to 6.

St. Paul wrote to the Romans chapter 7 verse 18 and 19 these words, "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Now if St Paul experienced the burden of sin, then I'm sure that we have all experienced it as well. And like St Paul, we would all like to do what is right rather than doing what is wrong. However, in our humanity and weakness we are destined to always fall short of perfection, but those who love God and want to please him will never give up trying to do better.

The last verse 7 reads, "Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous."

In John's day there were perverse people who said that you could be righteous without bothering to practice righteousness, and John strongly refutes that possibility in verse 7 of our reading by writing, "Only those who do right are righteous." So perhaps as a part of our decision making, we should ask ourselves, "Would Jesus do that."

To sum up John is telling us that we are, through our faith and trust in Christ, sons, and daughters of God through adoption, that we are equal heirs with Christ, but that in our humanity we will sin and fall short of perfection, but that through our repentance and God's grace we will be forgiven.

Christianity is more than an abstract belief, being a Christian is being a member of a family with God as our Father and with Christ our brother and friend, and like little children we are to stay close and not go astray.

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