

# Children of God

By Sarah Ashton

Acts 3v 12-19

1 John 3 v1-7

Luke 24 v 36b-48

Psalm 4

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be always acceptable in your sight O Lord. Amen

The theme for this morning, the second Sunday after Easter, is Children of God. Now, I am sure that you all know that I am a proud parent and an even prouder grandparent. But it hasn't always been an easy path. I remember the excitement and delight at holding the fragile gift of life in my new born children. There are a whole range of feelings that accompany the love for a child; excitement as they reach developmental milestones; the angst as they start school and really start to grow up and learn some independence. And then there have been times when I wondered and prayed hard that I could have a family who all cared for and respected each other. Parenting is not always an easy path and I am not just talking about the exhaustion a new parent feels.

As they were growing up, my daughter, the elder of my two children has often had to play second fiddle to my son, but as a parent I have had to be fair to both. My son was born with a physical disability which surgery has largely corrected but he also has the condition known as Attention Deficit Disorder and is very probably on the Autistic Spectrum too. Bringing him up has taken a lot of effort and patience and because his behaviours have been unacceptable at times Brandon and I have had to be firm and then forgiving, because to keep harmony in the family, discipline had to be seen but then there had to be restoration and we had to move on. Now my son is very happily married and helping to bring up a step son with similar issues. When he asks for advice we have to openly say that we didn't always get it right, but the very fact that he asks is testament to the closeness of the family now.

As a parent there are times when we are disappointed in the action of a child but our love for them should underpin all that we do. As our children become adults our love for them does not cease and quite often we are still part of their support network for childcare, advice, financial help (from the bank of mum and dad) and a sounding board when things are stressing them. And, of course, we also come together as families to celebrate and remember special times.

God shows the same love for us as a parent would, he is not biologically our father but through his grace we are able to have that relationship with him

In the reading from 1 John we are told that we are loved by God and that he calls us his children. As humans we all have a tendency to make poor choices and sin, but because we are loved by God and we have chosen to believe in Him and follow Him we are led out of the paths of sin and receive God's forgiveness. V 4 says that Jesus himself was sinless and that He came to earth to take away our sins. The Gospel reading from Luke tells of the risen Jesus appearing to the disciples, John who wrote the letter we are looking at was amongst these disciples. First Jesus had to physically convince them that He was the Jesus they knew and loved and then he taught them, by explaining the Scriptures so that they could understand that He had come to them, lived amongst them and set them an example as part of God's plan; but the conclusion of His time on earth was for Him to be the ultimate sacrifice, to die and rise again on the third day. It is in His death and resurrection that our sins are atoned for and with our repentance and God's forgiveness that we are part of God's family as His children.

In the passage in Acts 3, Peter is speaking to the crowd and again he summarises the conviction and death of Jesus and His resurrection. He then explains that the man who has just been healed in Jesus' name has received complete healing through faith, it is more than a physical healing but involves his whole being; he is right with God. In v19 Peter tells the crowd to repent that their sins might be forgiven through Jesus and that they might know God as their heavenly father too.

Throughout the Old Testament there are numerous references to God being like a father to the Jews. Moses talks about God as a father in Deuteronomy ch 1 when he is remonstrating with the Jews about their behaviour and he describes God as a father who carried his children to a new land. In I Chronicles (17 v13) Nathan relays to King David God's promise and in that He says 'I will be his father and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him' and he also promises David that he will be the leader of a great nation. When Jeremiah delivers God's message to the people in ch31 v9 God says 'I am Israel's father'. Before Jesus lived on earth God took the role of a heavenly father encouraging the Jews to be his children.

The notion of God being a Father is not a new one but it is taking the relationship a step further to stress that we are the children of God. The 10 Commandments give 4 instructions for the way Jews should worship God...He should be the only God, there should be no false images or idols, God's name is not to be misused and the Sabbath must be kept holy. Another Commandment refers to how parents should be treated, they should be honoured and

respected. God is our heavenly father. He loves us more than we can know or understand. He deserves all the respect and honour we can give Him. He knows our naughty ways and He forgives us when we are sorry for what we have done wrong. He loves us unconditionally. As human parents that love can be stretched but God has infinite stores of love for us. We only have to follow his teachings and believe with our heart. He knows our limits and there are times when he will push us to them. We encourage our children to learn to read, to study for exams as we want them to achieve their best, to make the most of themselves. Just as we support our children through the difficult times in their lives so God will support us if we turn to Him and lean on Him.

As children of God, when life deals us more than we can handle we can rest in the reality that God will be by our side and that with His help we will come through the pain. As children of God when life is good we need to remember to say thank you to our father in heaven and to share our fortune with those around us.

Later in the service we will say The Lord's Prayer, words that Jesus taught us. It starts 'Our Father who is in heaven'. So many times we have acknowledged that God is our father but today our focus is on the joy of being his children and the reassurance, comfort, sustenance, inspiration and love that we receive constantly when we walk in his way. We know how we expect our children to behave, God has the same hopes and expectations of us. It is a privilege to be a child of God, but it is not exclusive; being a child of God brings responsibilities and expectations for us to live with; but should we not live up to the required standard, we know that God's love is unconditional for all His children, He has no favourites, the sacrifice that Jesus made has opened the door for all who believe and embrace His teachings to be God's children.

#### Things to reflect on:

What are the blessings we have received from God, our heavenly father?

Let us remember the difficult times when he has shielded us like a father.

Let us pray for those who have yet to experience his love and that we might be a good role model for them and encourage them to find God's unconditional love and become His children.