

Children of God

Easter 3, Year B – I John 3:1-8

preached at St. Paul's, Henderson April 22, 2012

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

I had an epiphany of sorts just yesterday. Jenny and I stepped out the door of our Powell Street apartment yesterday and almost smack into the middle... of Tri-Fest. Since I got to Henderson barely two months ago, I have been regaled with stories about the sights and the sounds of this weekend's festivities, and yesterday we got to finally experience all of it for ourselves. About the time some group was running a relay race of some sort, Jenny and I took the grand tour of the Main Street fun, from Washington to Third and back again. We saw the rides, and the games, and the boneless pork chops, and even the deep-fried Oreos, Moon Pies and Twinkies. Since it was lunch time, we even felt obligated to consume some of the comestibles on offer: Jenny had a polish and onions, and I an Italian with onions *and* peppers, both washed down with a Lions Club lemon shake up – and of course a funnel cake for dessert.

As we got back down to the south side of the strip, I stopped for a moment to watch a little dark-haired boy of maybe six or seven “steer” a vehicle painted up as an Army armored vehicle as it went ‘round and ‘round and ‘round. And that’s when it happened. Standing there watching that little boy that could have been one of Jenny and mine, that could have been... *me*,

I had an epiphany of sorts as I remembered back to my own childhood. I stood there and remembered back to a simpler time. Not necessarily a better time, but a simpler one. I remembered a time when we didn’t have to be in charge and when maybe the biggest worry we had was whether the teacher was going to give a pop quiz the next day. I remembered back to an uncluttered time when the little bit we got as an allowance was more money than we could spend in a week; when financial decisions had nothing to do with anybody’s health care, or school tuition, or retirement plans. Standing there, I remembered summer nights chasing lightning bugs, the taste of a hot dog cooked on the end of a pointy stick over a campfire, ice cream from Stanley, the ice cream man – maybe a Bomb Pop, or a Fudgesicle, or a Drumstick. I remembered back to that time when the biggest worry we had was keeping our shoes tied; or catching the ball before someone yelled, “Car!” and we had to vacate our “field,” or whether we were going to find anything good to read at the library with our new cards.

Do you remember running a Kool-Aid stand? How ‘bout tree houses, or, if you spent your winters somewhere other than Phoenix, Arizona, snow forts? Did you ever use a horse trough as a swimming pool? Or do you remember the delicious way you shiver when you stretched out on the warm concrete deck of the pool? Remember listening to baseball on a transistor radio? Or seeing your first color TV? Remember when you didn’t need to wear a watch, you just had wait for your mother to call you for supper? Remember when the scariest monsters in the world were King Kong, Godzilla, and Frankenstein – not some guy named Saddam or Osama or bin-Something-or-other? Remember when a boy caring a pocket knife was a normal thing, not a federal offense? Remember when a stick could become anything from a fishing pole, to Zorro’s sword, to Arnie Palmer’s driver, to a Jedi light saber?

Do you remember when you felt safe in your father’s lap or in your mother’s arms, where you knew you were completely and totally and unconditionally loved, no matter what you might do, where you could leave all your worries and fears and struggles and frustrations and mistakes, and not have to carry them anymore?

I had an epiphany of sorts yesterday watching one happy little boy – and got to thinking about standing here with you this morning, and I got to thinking about today’s readings. “See

what love the Father has given us,” John says, “that we should be called children of God; and that is what we *are*.” “Beloved,” he continues, “we are God’s children *now*.”

Oh, I know that our memories of childhood are not all of joyous, carefree times. For some of us, maybe there was *never* a sense of safety. For some of us there was *never* a sense of belonging. Maybe there *wasn't* a father to turn to in times of trouble. Maybe there *wasn't* a mother who liked to snuggle and sing lullabies. Maybe some of us had a close knit family but there just wasn't enough money to ever feel safe or carefree. Maybe someone-out-there's parents were carrying so much baggage themselves and all that... stuff got in the way of any meaningful or deep relationship with their children. Maybe for some, either as a family secret or right out in front of everyone, some battle, or some bottle, or *somebody* kept family from being a place of safety and comfort. Maybe for some, sticks weren't for playing with, but for being beaten.

I want you to know that the message we find in John's letter this morning is the same for *all* of us. For those of us who have known love – and for those who haven't. This is a message and an invitation into a new relationship. A relationship defined by God. A relationship witnessed to by the disciples. A relationship lived out before us by our Savior.

We're not just *called* the children of God, like the Old Testament talks about the children of Israel. This isn't just a technicality. This isn't just nomenclature. This is *genealogy*. This is *pedigree*. This is *reality*. We *are* the Children of God. Friends, that's exactly who we are, right *now*. Not off in the sweet-by-and-by, not off in some long-distant future. Not next month, not next week, not even tomorrow or later this afternoon – *right now*. Right now we are the children of a God who loves us unconditionally. Right now we are the children of a God who went to unthinkable lengths to prove just how much we are loved. Right now we are the children of a God who desperately wants us to know him and to love him for no other reason than that he loves us.

I want you to remember, and I want you to experience the reality of God's love in the here and now, and I want you to step *forward*. Because there is a greater love and a greater safety and a greater comfort than any of us could ever experience with our earthly families. For those who've never experienced that kind of love, let me tell you, you're in for a real treat. And for those whose parents were an amalgam of Jim and Margaret Anderson, Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, June and Ward Cleaver, Donna Reed, Uncle Bill and Shirley Partridge all rolled into one, even that is *nothing* compared to the love of the God – who, because of love *for you*, created everything, seen and unseen.

This morning as we celebrate, as we do so often, with our family meal of bread and wine, we celebrate, too, the absolute *fact* that we *are* God's children. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God.” Children loved with the force that brought creation into being. Children loved with the depth that went to Calvary for our sins. Children loved with the resurrection power that cancelled death. Children loved pricelessly, children loved senselessly, children loved extravagantly. We are children loved beyond the limits of our understanding – or even our greatest imagining.

And isn't *that* an epiphany of sorts?

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