

My Little Children

1 John 3:1-7
April 19, 2015

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

There is something that every person here in this room has in common, no one excluded. What is the one thing we all share?

Are all of us here in this room Lutherans? No. Are all of us Christians? I hope so. Are all of us American citizens? Probably. So, what is the one experience every person in this room has had?

We are all human beings. We all breathe, drink water, and eat food to stay alive. Another experience we share is childhood. All of us have been or are children. Not all of us are parents. Not all of us have been mothers or fathers or brothers or sisters. But we all experience childhood. So we all can answer the question, "What is it like to be a child?"

What is it like to be a child? Fun. Play. Amuse yourself. Every child knows what it means to play. Every child has played with a stick, a ball, or had a race. Every child has known what it meant to "go and hide". Most American children have had some experience with a wagon, a tricycle, or a bicycle.

What is it to be a child? It's to have fun. It's to play. It's to be creative, imaginative, and explore the world around us. Every child has looked under a leaf. Every child has touched a blade of grass and fondled it and wondered about it. Every child is delighted to find a penny, a pin, a rock, a stone, something under the sofa. Every child has been frightened by thunder and lightning. Every child has looked at the clouds and wondered what they are made of. Every child has been fascinated by birds flying over their heads.

What is it to be a child? It is to be dependent. Every young child is basically helpless. Every child needs to be taken care of. Someone has to meet their needs for food and water and warmth and clothing. Every child is vulnerable. A child can't take care of him or herself. A child is basically helpless. All children need nurturing.

What is it to be a child? It's to need love. Even in the poorest of poor nations, a child needs to be loved by a mother and a father. The same is true in the richest of nations. Children need to be loved by moms and dads. To be held and hugged. Every child in the world needs love by a mother or father, as much as the child needs food, water and clothing.

When I think of childhood, I think of sneaking out of the house before dawn to go fishing. I think of sledding down a monster hill. I think of eating the rhubarb that grew in the neighbors garden, or climbing a cherry tree to eat not-quite-ripe cherries. I think of homemade go carts and racing down the alley.

When I think about childhood, I often wonder what happened to "the little child" that I knew so well, the little child that lived inside. What happened to me? What happens to happy little children who grow up to become men and women who often seem to have lost that childish innocence, happiness, and enthusiasm? What happens to the child in all of us?

Common to every person here in this room is the experience of being a child. All of us know what it means to be little children. And it is with this image of little children that we approach the epistle for today.

In the epistle John writes: *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!* (1 Jn 3:1 NIV).

Nine times in this letter, John uses the phrase – "little children". It's the Greek word – "teknoi" – little children. "Little children do not sin." "Little children, your sins are forgiven." "Little children, it is the last hour." "Little children, let no one deceive you." "Little children, love with deeds and truth." "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Eight times the author addresses his reader with his pet phrase, "Little children. My little children."

Jesus also spoke about little children: *Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these* (Mt 19:14 NIV).

Little children. Teknoi. How we love the little children.

The Bible teaches that by calling us "little children" God reveals his love for us. God loves us immensely and knows our vulnerability, our helplessness, our childishness, our foolishness, and he is patient with us because we are his little children. God knows that we are not mature, grown-up adults. God knows that we are little children. See the great love that the Father has for us by calling us his children.

Every mother or father realizes what it means to love their little children. We have this deep abiding love for our children. There is no greater earthly love than that of a parent for a child. And such is God's love for us. God's love for all the little children of the universe. We are "his" children, and that personal pronoun "his" makes all the difference

in the world.

When a child is your own, you love that child deeply. You love them in spite of their faults, in spite of their irritations, in spite of their problems. You just love them.

And so it is with our heavenly Father. We are God's little children. We are his. We belong to him. And by calling us his little children, he reveals the patient, intense love he has for us.

What is the most valuable room in your house? Let's imagine that you live in a large palace of a hundred rooms. In one room are all the beautiful crown jewels of Russia and England. In another room are all the diamonds of South Africa. And in another room are all the paintings from the Louvre. In another room is a gorgeous, heated, indoor swimming pool with a sauna and Jacuzzi, and in still another room a pool table.

In all these rooms are the most beautiful and expensive things in the world. But there is one room, the family room off the kitchen where all the family gathers together. Your children, your grandchildren, your family. Now, tell me, loving parent, what would be your favorite room in the house? It's the family room where your children are. Your children are by far the most valuable possession because your children talk to you and love you and respond to you and you to them.

So it is with God, who happens to own the palace of the universe. And in one room God has all the galaxies, in another room all the stars, and in another room all the planets and the moons. However, in all the rooms of God's house, only one room has people. That room is the planet Earth. The Earth is God's family room.

As his children, we are worth more than all the galaxies, all the stars, and all the planets. The reason God loves us more than anything else in creation is obvious. We children can talk to God, tell him that we love him, tell him when we are happy or sad. The reason we are God's most valuable possession is that we are his children and talk to him.

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Jn 3:1 NIV). So John teaches. So Jesus teaches.

Yet, according to the Bible, not every human being is a child of God. God loves the whole creation. God loves every human being ever born. But not every human being is a child of God. You can be a human being and not be a child of God. So who are the children of God? And how can you be sure you are a child of God?

In the third chapter of this letter, John gives us the litmus test for distinguishing between God's children and Satan's children. John writes: *This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If*

anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence (1 Jn 3:10, 16-19 NIV).

If our hearts and our lives are consumed with love for God and love for our neighbors, then the love of God lives in us and we are truly the children of God. God loves us so much he has adopted us into his eternal family. I pray that God's love for us will move us to love our neighbors enough to invite them to come and join the family.