

May 7, 2006
Easter 4

“Cherish Your Identity as Children of God”

1 JOHN 3:1-2

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

A couple of weeks ago I met a friend in Costco who had just returned from a conference in Las Vegas. The conference taught law enforcement people about future problems with security and identity theft. Did you know that there are people who make a living by dumpster diving? They sort through trash looking for old bank statements and credit card information that can be used to steal your identity and commit crimes using private information about you. As we were talking I noticed his shopping cart contained a box with the latest and best paper shredder. This friend took the words he heard seriously. He was personally stepping up his efforts to protect himself from identity theft with a shredder that could shred documents and credit cards into small little pieces.

Satan, our enemy, the old evil foe, is a very good dumpster diver. He wants to sort through your life, even your life this past week, and paint a gloomy and bleak picture of who you are. He can lead you to toss and turn at night and create a dark world when you wake up in the morning. He is capable of getting you to look into the mirror and not see the big picture of who you are, a dear baptized children of your heavenly Father. He can wire you to the ways of this world and the weakness of your sinful nature to convince you that you are not someone very special to Jesus, your Shepherd who said, “I know my sheep, and they follow me and I give them eternal life and no one will pluck them from my hand.”

Let’s turn our attention to the words that we just read to you from 1 John that encourage you to **“Cherish Your Identity as Children of God.”**

Look at what you are

Who are you? Who is the person that is staring back at you every morning when you look into the mirror? John told the dear Christians who we were being beat up and led astray by false teachings, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God.” “Behold!” What a powerful attention getting word that is. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Jesus told his disciples the night he rose from the dead, “Behold, or look at, my hands and my side.” The key to making it through this life as a Christian and not being discouraged is beholding and seeing clearly who we are and what we are, dear children of our heavenly Father.

Behold, dear Christian. Just look again at the manner of love the Father has bestowed on us. Friday morning, I looked out the window early in the morning and saw the sun was

shining. After a couple of weeks of gloomy weather, it was good to see the sun shining. Even, if the sun does not shine, there is so much to be thankful for every morning. Think of all the ways the Lord provides for us with the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the homes and beds and blankets that keep us warm at night. I am holding in my hand a bag of rice. Did you know according to National Geographic Magazine, there are 24,000 varieties of rice in the world? Why so many varieties of rice, wheat, peaches, plums, apples? It was our loving heavenly Father who said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds."

How many times has the Lord protected you from harm and danger with his guardian angels, or provided you with a government that has allowed us to go five years without another terrorist attack on our homeland. Psalm 103 says, "Bless the Lord oh my soul, let all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, oh my soul and forget not all his benefits." Satan is there in the morning to paint a gloomy picture of how little is in your cup. Your heavenly Father wants you to remember that your cup is overflowing and that goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life, 24/7 not just a couple of minutes each day.

Behold! Be astounded at the manner of love that your Father has bestowed on you that you should be called a child of God. It was the pen of the Apostle John that was led to record the words Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about the quality and quantity of God's love for us. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." The Greek word for "love" is agape. In the New Testament it takes on the meaning of sacrificial love, the kind of sacrificial love we see in our Father who was willing to give us the gift of his Son. How can we ever exhaust the comfort of John 3:16? We can take that verse and put our name into it. "God so world (Steve) he gave his only begotten Son..."

Look into the mirror, and see the face staring back at you? Then look at all the walls around you and the room in which you are standing. Surrounding you is the love of the Father that gave his Son just for you. Romans 5 tells us: "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were sinners Christ died for us."

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God." The times that I am most overwhelmed by love are the times when someone loves me even though I don't deserve that love. Did you ever have a wife or husband, or mom and dad, or a friend, show love to you when you least deserve it? It almost brings tears to you eyes. In my personal devotions, I have been reading this past week from the book of Ephesians. How many times have I read through that book? Yet when I read the words from Ephesians 2 I was almost overwhelmed at how much God loved me. He loved me, even me, considering how unlovable I was when I was born into this world. Yes, God love me when I was a dead in my trespasses and sin. God loved me when I followed the ways of the world as it says in Ephesians, "in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. ...All of us lived among them at one time...Like the rest we were by nature objects of wrath just as the others." Then it goes on to say, "But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions." And yes, God loves me even when I look into the mirror and Satan whispers in my ear, "You worm!"

You rotten scum bag of a worm. You aren't worthy of being love."

The world can't help you see who you truly are. Dr. Laura can't help you, or Dr. Phil or other self-help books. The world does not have the foggiest idea of what it means to be a child of God as John reminds us, "Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him." They do not know what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God. I love what Martin Luther did when Satan tried to steal him of his identity. Luther would always say to himself, "Baptisus sum." These are Latin words that mean, "I am baptized." A Christian does not say, "I have been baptized." A Christian says, "I am baptized"-the present tense, because our baptism is a daily, living reality in our lives. You don't have an identity problem when you remember your baptism. You were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Galatians tells us, " You are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Some children were playing on the playground and they began teasing one of the boys and picking on him. One of the nasty bullies told the boy, "You don't have real parents. You are adopted. You don't even know who your parents are." The boy responded: "Oh, yeah? When you were born, your parents didn't have a choice. They had to keep you. My parents chose me to be their child. They wanted me." "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God." Before you were ever born, before you even proved yourself to be the sinner and object of wrath that you are, God chosen you to believe in Jesus his Son. And you have the adoption papers to prove it. You have your baptism.

Look at what you will be

Satan tries to steal our identity on who we are now. He will also try to steal our identity on who we will someone day be when we are raised to life again on the last day. John loves to remind his dear children and us, about what we will be someday be. "Beloved, now we are children of and it has not been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." The word for "revealed" was used to describe how Jesus performed miracles to reveal or show that he was the Son of God. That word was also used to describe how Jesus will appear or reveal himself to us on the last day. 1 Peter 5:4 says, "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." When Jesus comes in clouds of glory we will clearly see the kind of life he has planned for us in the future, and the kind of glorified bodies that will be ours. John says that now in this current life "It has not been revealed to us what we shall be." We know in part, but we do not have the full understanding of what it will be like.

How often haven't you heard someone say, "I wonder what heaven will be like." You have often asked yourself the same question. "What will heaven be like and what kind of body will I have?" It has not been revealed exactly what our bodies will be like, or what the place will be like that Jesus has prepared for us. The Revelation tells us that someday God will wipe away all tears from our eyes, all pain and all sorrow. It describes heaven in glowing terms with descriptions of gates of pearl and streets of gold. Death will be no more. That is good to know. We know that we will receive new bodies similar to the body of Jesus that was raised to life again. "We shall be like him." Philippians says, "He shall transform our

lowly bodies that they may be like his glorious body.”

Here is how Joni Eareckson Tada, a Christian paraplegic, expressed her hope in a bodily resurrection on the last day:

I can scarcely believe it, I with shrivelled, bent fingers, atrophied muscles, gnarled knees, and no feeling from the shoulders down, will one day have a new body, light, bright, and clothed in righteousness—powerful and dazzling. Can you imagine the hope this gives someone spinal cord-injured like me? Or someone who is cerebral palsied, brain-injured, or who has multiple sclerosis? Imagine the hope this gives someone who is manic depressive. No other religion, no other philosophy promises new bodies, hearts and minds. Only in the Gospel of Christ do hurting people find such incredible hope.

We will also see him as he is, face to face in all of his glory. A missionary to the people of the South Sea Islands was translating this verse into the language of the native people. They were looking for a word to capture the meaning of the words, “We shall see him as he is.” The native said, “Let’s help the people understand how beautiful this is by saying, ‘And then we shall kiss his feet.’” The missionary responded, “No, let’s translate it as it is. We shall see him face to face.” The night before he died Jesus prayed, “Father I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory I had with you before the world began.”

Satan will always try to steal your identity and even make you feel sorry for yourself. This morning we stand in awe of God’s word that holds up our true identity. “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God.” Amen.