

Of Noble Birth
The United Church of Broomfield
April 18, 2021

1 John 3:1-7

1 What marvelous love [God] has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are. But that's also why the world doesn't recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who he is or what he's up to.

2-3 But friends, that's exactly who we are: children of God. And that's only the beginning. Who knows how we'll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we'll see him—and in seeing him, become like him. All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus' life as a model for our own.

4-6 All who indulge in a sinful life are dangerously lawless, for sin is a major disruption of God's order. Surely you know that Christ showed up in order to get rid of sin. There is no sin in him, and sin is not part of his program. No one who lives deeply in Christ makes a practice of sin. None of those who do practice sin have taken a good look at Christ. They've got him all backward.

7-8 So, my dear children, don't let anyone divert you from the truth. It's the person who *acts* right who *is* right, just as we see it lived out in our righteous Messiah.

Have you ever used one of those ancestry or DNA at-home kits? You know, the ones where you spit into a tube and mail it back to some company? There are two websites, Ancestry.com which focuses on helping you learn about your geographic and ethnic heritage and 23andme, which also helps you better understand your genetic heritage for things related to your health or your prevalence for chocolate. If you have used these service, what was the impetus for using it? Were you told that your family can be traced back to the Ellis Island or the Mayflower landing? Perhaps you were interested in confirming whether those stories are true or not? Or perhaps, you're adopted, and you want more information about where your biological family's geography may originate? Maybe your family tree and "good heritage," is important to you and it's a matter of pride to be able to not only claim, but validate that you **are, in fact**, a descendent of Abraham Lincoln. In your efforts to learn of your forefathers and foremothers, have you discovered someone famous – a prince perhaps, or maybe someone known for some not-so-proud moments?

A few years ago, there were a couple of popular television shows called, "Finding your Roots" and "Who do you think you are," in which celebrities worked with genealogists to review historical records to discover information about their ancestors. The findings ranged from nothing special, to shock and shame, as well as joy and immense pride.

Certainly, there is a legitimate pride to be had in one's ancestors and line of decent, but one must be aware of the dangers of a false pride. Plutarch wisely said, "It is indeed a desirable thing to be well descended, but the glory belongs to our ancestors." In other words, if we can be grateful for a good heritage, and avoid assuming the credit for it, as if we merited such a heritage, then we are within the bounds of true dignity.

True dignity is characterized by a grateful humility, and not boastful pride. This is where humanity too often fails and allows their good heritage to be a liability rather than an asset. They become proud; **TOO** proud of fathers that attended certain schools or family that belonged to elite clubs, organizations or societies. They make others feel uncomfortable when, by humility, they could use such a noble heritage as a subject on which to express gratitude, and to cause others to also count their blessings. A good heritage is only of value if it makes you a better person yourself.

So many people, who haven't been raised knowing their ancestors, who don't actually know their ancestors or have been made to feel shame of their lineage, the question that can hover over them is, "Can I...or do I have a reason to be proud of my heritage and ancestors....even if I might know the exact details of it all?"

In today's first letter from John, he wrote to persons whose ancestors were pagans or slaves, and yet, in as clear and forceful language as possible, he tells them they are of exceedingly high birth. John is saying that Christians have a heritage so rich and noble it makes the chain of the succession of the kings of England look like a string of paupers in comparison. We would have to coin a new word to express it anywhere near adequately, for if it is a noble birth to be born of a king, what is it to be born of the King of Kings? This is what John says at the end of chapter two is the case with those who are righteous through Jesus Christ-they are born of God. He goes on into chapter three to dwell on the marvel of it.

It is simply amazing and astounding John says that we should be called the children of God; that God would lavish such love on us – Her children. What pedigree can match that?

Anyone who has been made righteous through Jesus Christ, even if their ancestors were slaves, and they themselves are slaves, can claim a higher and holier heritage, for their genealogy goes back, not just to Adam and Eve, but to the Creator, and the God and parent of Jesus Christ. Our family tree in Christ contains all the saints of God from the beginning of time. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the Prophets, Christ and the Apostles, are all in our spiritual ancestry. We have two family trees, and two genealogies-one natural and one spiritual. We are, in fact, members of the greatest heritage and greatest family - the family of God. If anyone has basis for boasting in a marvelously noble birth and rich heritage, it is us. Yet, we cannot boast in pride, for it is all unmerited, for it is all of grace. We did not choose God for our Creator. God chose us for His children. We only love Him because He first loved us. No matter what comes to the Christian they should be one who is perpetually and humbly grateful that they have been made a child of God.

Author Sarah Arthur has said, "The story of faith still has a narrative arc: a beginning, middle, and end. We do have a sense of where this whole thing is headed in, even if we can't prescribe every stage of the journey for each unique individual. Being formed in the image of Christ is the process and goal of spiritual formation: that's what we're working and praying toward; that's what we're helping youth to become: "little Christs" - Christians who reflect the image of Jesus to the world."

Children of God are known by their demonstrative nature; **how** we conform to loving God and one another. They will know we are Christians by our love. We are already children of God, and have the greatest heritage possible, but there is still a greater hope yet to come, for when we see God face to face, we shall be like Them. In other words, Christlikeness is the ultimate goal of those who believe in Jesus Christ, and that being so, John says the proof that one is really a child a God heading for that ultimate goal is seen in the fact that one is right now striving to be Christlike. If Christlikeness is really our hope for eternity, we will be aiming for it in time, and purifying ourselves as Jesus is pure.

We must be worthy of our birth. We are children of God – the creator of all. How we live before the world will determine how others feel about our heavenly Father and spiritual Mother. As Christians, our concept of God has been determined by the life and love of Jesus. Our goal is to be like Jesus so that the world can know God as we know God; benevolent, merciful, just and loving. For this to happen, we **must**, first and foremost, demonstrate our love for others through grace. Everyone, unconditionally and without question is a child of God. We choose to live in the world following Jesus.

John says the world will not recognize us as children of God, for they do not know God. In that declaration, grace abounds for all – Jew/Gentile, Free/Slave, Male/Female/non-binary, LGBTQIA, Christian/Muslim, Buddhists/non-believers, etc. etc. etc. That is the lavish love of God. That is why we are all children of God.

There have been and always will be those who will persecute and kill children of God, *Christian or not isn't the point*. If we persist in being as pure as Christ under all circumstances, persecutors will eventually see our good works and glorify God. AND...we don't have to witness that eventuality --- because it is for God's judgement and purpose to reconcile God's children to Him. It's our purpose to trust God and graciously love one another – ALL OTHERS.

So, dear children of God, don't let anyone divert you from the truth. It's the person who *acts* right who *is* right. We are poor branches of God's family tree if we do not admire the whole tree. May God help us to live lives worthy of our noble birth.

AMEN