

## 1 John 3:1-3 sermon – Tregear – 22.8.2021

The little boy ran and played with great joy. “Mum, Mum, look at this.” “Look what I can do”. “Can you help me Mum?”. The mother gladly helped the boy on the swing. Suddenly jumping off the swing he landed with a thud scraping his knee. Tears flowed. Ran back to Mum. Mum enclosed him with her long arms. I watched as my grandson gradually regained his composure. My daughter, my little girl, the one who had found a safe place in my arms was now providing that safe place for her child. I still marvel at the miracle of a parent’s love and care for a child, the desire to protect, to provide, to love unconditionally.

We, too, are described as God’s children in our short Bible reading today. We belong, cared for, nurtured by our loving father. This is a great truth.

But we need to start at the beginning of v.1 don’t we? What does John say? He reminds us of God’s great love for us. John is the NT writer who does go on and on about God’s love. He uses the word 4 times as much in his gospel than do the other Gospel writers. And here in his letter he uses it also about 4 times more than any other of the letters from Paul or Peter. WHAT GREAT LOVE. This is the love that has the effect of making us children of God. In Romans 8:16 Paul says, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” In John’s Gospel he says that those who believe in Jesus’ name are “born of God”. God rebirths us when we trust and believe in him. In one sense all humans are children of God in that God is their maker. But Christians are children of God in a still fuller sense. We don’t simply look at a love that is external to us, or outside of us, and marvel at its greatness; we know a love that is there living inside of us. God’s spirit testifies that we are his children.

But God also has a distinct purpose in his great love. What does John say, “God’s great love is lavished on us SO THAT we would be called children of God.” This love is lavished on us so that we can enter into relationship with the Father. As we say week after week God has made us for relationship. And here it is again. God lavishes his love on us so that we can be good people, be spiritual people, be successful people, be confident people – no so that we will just be HIS children.

His CHILDREN – weak, needing care, needing nurture, needing a safe place, needing guidance, needing to belong. So we have this as his children.

One last thing we can note is the quality of God's love. God's love is great as it stands in stark contrast to other expressions of love shown by parents in John's day. While the natural love of the father for children would certainly have been there in his day it is also true that human fathers in the Roman world were not always affectionate or even fair. Children could be abused and were often unwanted. And there was no punishment for this – it was just accepted as the parent's right. Unwanted children would be exposed on the hillsides and left to die. Childhood was by no means always a time of safety and nurture in John's time. And the same is true for today. Some of you have been the victims of abuse and neglect and you carry the scars of that. But we have a Father who lavishes a great love on us, most clearly seen in his death on the cross for us.

So why is John saying all this? Well, we see in v.1 that the world does not recognise them as God's children. In fact, they will treat them as enemies. So John says don't forget who you are in Christ. You are the children of the creator of the Universe. It shouldn't be surprising if the world doesn't recognise us as God's children – they didn't recognise Jesus as God's Son either despite all his powerful actions.

So that's our first point that John is hammering – WE ARE God's children

Point Two – We will ALWAYS be God's children. And so in v.2,3 John points to the hope we have as God's children. In v.2 he repeats again, “now we are children of God”, not in some future state but NOW. WE ARE children of God and the future for us in terms of what we will be and how we will live has some unknowns. John Calvin has put it this way: “Physically, we are dust and a shadow, and death is always before our eyes. We are exposed to a thousand miseries and our souls to innumerable evils, so that we always find a hell within us. The more necessary is it that our senses should be withdrawn from the view of present things, lest the miseries . . . should shake our trust in that happiness which as yet is hidden.” In other words it's so easy, in a time of pandemic, and terrorism, and bushfires, and broken relationships to overwhelm us, to lose hope. Calvin says we need to

remember what God has in store for us as we live in the world today. We are not made for this world; we are made for relationship with a holy God.

But the second half of v.2 reminds us that WE KNOW with certainty that on Jesus' return we shall 1. Be like him. 2. See him as he is. Paul says something similar in Colossians 3:4 when he states, "When Christ . . . appears then you also will appear with him in glory". In glory. That means we will be changed. John expresses it this way – when Jesus returns we shall be like him. As you look on the faces of others in Zoom you are looking at people who are immortal, they will live for ever – either with God, being like Jesus, without sin or apart from God.

And we will see God in a way that we have never experienced before.

So be encouraged. This week as I wash the dishes at home, I rejoice in the fact that I am God's child; as I sit alone thinking of my loved ones who I can't visit, I remember that I am loved by you. I am never apart from you.

The last thing in v.3 is the encouragement that all who have this hope in God purify themselves. What is the hope in him? It means that the object of our hope is Jesus and his return. He is coming back. This hope is so certain that it has a spillover effect on our lives – we want to be like Jesus (Remember last week, continue in him. It's a very similar message.) It's a bit like I've filled in my tax return and I've worked out I'll be getting a big return. So I buy something big in anticipation of receiving the tax return at a future date. Now I might get it wrong with my tax return but with Jesus' return it's a sure bet, it's an absolute certainty.

I like the way the The Message puts it, "Stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus' life as a model for our own." How do we keep purifying ourselves? We keep looking at Jesus and following him. He is the model for our purity. Being pure doesn't mean that we go walking around with a halo around our head, but we are having our old self, our old values reshaped; behaviour patterns reshaped to be more like Jesus. As a Child grows and develops it needs to listen, obey, learn from his or her parents. We all know the effects of a spoilt child, I'm sure you've seen it. Jesus is growing us, shaping us, disciplining us that we might reflect his purity. So we keep our eyes on him.

I can't help but finish with my favourite story of a father and child in the Bible. The prodigal son takes his inheritance before his father is dead. He wastes it all and then returns. How does the Father treat him? There is no chastising it's welcoming open arms as he admits his wrongdoing. Our Father wants us to come to him; he wants relationship with us. He actually showers us with gifts when what we deserve is a big slap. God does that with us. As his children he just longs that we come back to him. Remember Matthew 11 – Come to me all that are weary and heavy-laden; Rev 3:21 – Behold I stand at the door and knock, I want to come and eat with you.

PRAYER: As we close in prayer, I want you to just picture yourself lying with your head on God's lap. Yes, you are his child. Thank you, Father, that I am safe in your arms. Thank you, Father, that I have a sure hope, now and in the future. Fill us, Holy spirit, with a greater understanding of your holiness. Help us to really fully live in the hope we have that we are NOW your children and we WILL BE your children forever.