

LIKE HIM

1 John 3:1-7

Third Sunday of Easter (Series B)

April 15, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The epistle lesson for the Third Sunday of Easter comes from *The First Letter of John*, chapter 3, verses 1 through 7. It is on page 863 of the pew Bible. In this epistle lesson, the Apostle John reminds us who we are and how that affects both our future hope and the way we live now. Please stand as you are able for the epistle lesson. From 1 John 3, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In 1992 there was a commercial that came out with the song, "I Want to Be Like Mike." The star of the commercial was Michael Jordan, who was, at least at that time, the best basketball player on the planet. So, while the song played, the commercial showed clips of Michael Jordan winning the NBA Finals, playing pickup games with little kids, and, of course, drinking Gatorade. The commercial presented Mike as the greatest basketball player ever and just an all-around really great guy. And the song—not so subtly—implanted the idea that every kid should want to be just like Mike. And then the words on the screen at the end were even less subtle. It said, "Be like Mike. Drink Gatorade."

Pretty much every young basketball player idolized Michael Jordan. They wanted to be just like Mike, and Gatorade cashed in. Someone, somewhere, is still swimming in the bucks they made off that commercial. It worked because kids idolized Michael Jordan. They wanted to be just like him. And why not? If there was one basketball player you aspired to be like, it was Michael Jordan.

And we do this with all sorts of people. We idolize our favorite hockey players, our favorite rock stars, and those people on TV who take beat up houses and make them look beautiful in thirty minutes. There are people who really impress us. They might be celebrities, or they might be people we actually know. And we want to be just like them. So we dress like them. We try to

be like them, walk like them, talk like them. And we even buy the stuff we see them using. We idolize them. And, often times, we do this without even knowing that we do this.

Now, if there's one person we *should* idolize, who do you think that would that be? If there's one person we should desire to be just like, who is that person? Since we're in church, you probably won't be very surprised when I tell you that person is Jesus.

I suppose our natural tendency—and I hope you're learning that our natural tendencies are not always good—I suppose our natural tendency is to think of this primarily in moral terms. That is, we should try to imitate Jesus' behavior. And this is true and good ... to an extent. Jesus is a good example. He didn't sin. That makes him the best example.

But the danger with using Christ as our example, is that he might become *only* an example, and that's really bad. Our natural tendency is to think that if we *act* like Christ, then we will *become* like him. But that doesn't work. Changing our outward actions cannot and will not change our inward condition. No amount of trying really hard will make you not be a sinner anymore, just like no amount of Gatorade will turn a nine-year-old into Michael Jordan. It doesn't work.

Now, this text from 1 John does talk about being like Jesus (3:2), but I want you to notice something very important: it's not a commandment; it's a promise. So let's consider this promise.

We are God's children right now. John says, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (3:1). Now, the Father was not our father—at least not naturally, and at least not initially. At first he was the Father of Jesus Christ, and Jesus is his only Son (John 3:16). Initially we did not have a father-child relationship with the Father, because we were enemies of God. We were hostile, because the world is hostile to the Father and also his Son. The world does not know him. And this is why the love of God is so remarkable. We were not the children of God. We were children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). But in his love the Father gave his only Son to die for us, and it is because of this "that we should be called children of God." It is by this remarkable love that the Father calls rebellious creatures his children. And John has this simple, yet remarkable, statement about that. He says, "And so we are." By God's declaration, this becomes a reality. He calls you his child, and so you are. God's Word is powerful and authoritative. It's like a king pronouncing a foreigner to be a citizen of his country. Before he wasn't a citizen, but then the king calls him a citizen, and so he is, just like that, and no one can refute it. But with God it's even stronger and more intimate. This is more than citizenship. This is the Creator of heaven and earth calling you his own child. It's a declaration of adoption. The highest authority in heaven and earth calls you his child. That's as valid an adoption as there is. God declares it, so it is.

But the problem we encounter in the present time is that we don't experience what you think one would experience when adopted by the highest authority in the universe. All of creation—from the wind to the earth to the people on the earth—all of creation is subject to God. So you might think that his children would get a little more respect. And I don't simply mean from the people around us. Sure, if they knew who we belonged to, we would get the royal treatment. But the world did not recognize Jesus. They gave Jesus a criminal's treatment instead of the royal treatment. And if they did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God, they will certainly not recognize us as children of God. So, like our elder brother, we patiently endure

whatever mistreatment may come our way. But even the non-human parts of the universe—we would expect to get more respect from them too, because the weather, the plants, and even death itself are subject to God. If the weather knew who we were, we would expect it to not snow on our driveways. But it does ... a lot ... just like everywhere else. And if death knew who it was really dealing with, you would expect it to leave us alone, but it doesn't. Death still persecutes the children of God. So we don't experience everything you think we should as God's children.

"We are God's children now" (3:2)—most certainly—"and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him" (3:2). And I want you to notice that statement. "When he"—that is, Jesus—"When he appears we shall be like him." And this is the promise for the future.

One of my favorite things as a pastor is when people ask me about the stuff they've been thinking about. I don't always know the answer, but when I do, it's really convenient, because then I know exactly what part of the Scriptures need to be taught. So I can take some portion of Scripture and just stick it right into the spot someone has been thinking about. And it's pretty much my favorite thing. And one of the things people tend to ask quite a bit, especially around the time of death—either of themselves or of a loved one—is what we will be like in heaven. They also ask what heaven will be like, and we'll deal with that sometime too. But the question this text answers is what we will be like in heaven. And John's answer is really simple: "We will be like him"—that is, Jesus.

And I'll give you just one caveat. We will not be exactly like Jesus in every way. That's because Jesus is both God and man. He has a divine nature and a human nature. We will not become gods like him. We will not receive the divine nature. But we will be perfect humans like him. Whatever can be said about Jesus' perfected human nature will also be true for us. So then we ask, what is Jesus' human nature like?

And we got a glimpse of this in the gospel lesson from Luke 24(:36-49). It's this scene from the evening of Jesus' resurrection. It's the same event we considered last week from *The Gospel of John* (20:19-23). But different authors might have a little bit different perspective. So Luke has this really strong emphasis on the physicality of Jesus' resurrection. John does too, but Luke includes some interesting details.

Many of the disciples—more than just the small group we usually think of, but the large group—they were gathered together. They had heard reports of Jesus' resurrection. A few of them has actually seen him (Matt. 28:9; John 20:11-18; Luke 24:13-31), but larger group apparently wasn't convinced yet. I mean, even though Jesus taught them beforehand that he would rise from the dead (Luke 9:22; 18:33), it's just really hard to believe it until you see it. So when Jesus stood among them and said, "**Peace to you!**" (Luke 24:36), they thought he was a spirit (Luke 24:37). Even when they saw him, they couldn't believe what they were seeing. So Jesus showed them his hands and feet and invited them to touch him. He said, "**Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have**" (Luke 24:39).

And then, while they're still trying to wrap their brain cells around this, Jesus does the most mundane and ordinary thing. But he does it to prove his physicality to them, and Luke records this mundane and ordinary thing to prove it to us as readers. And I think the scene is kind of funny. Jesus asked them for some food (Luke 24:41). So they gave him a piece of fish, and then

he ate it in front of them (Luke 24:42-43). And I think it's funny to imagine the scene. Nobody else is eating; it's just Jesus. So here's this group of maybe fifty or a hundred people, and I imagine they're all just standing there, watching him eat. I mean, what else would you do? You just thought this guy was dead. And they probably don't say anything, but I think I can guess what they're all thinking. They're thinking, *Are you sure he's not a ghost?* As they watch him take a bite of this fish, they're watching to see if it just slides through him and drops to the floor. But it doesn't. Jesus just eats this piece of fish like a normal flesh and bone person would. And it's about the most amazing thing they've ever seen. It's pretty close to the most mundane detail in the whole Bible, but it's also so interesting. And Luke records it for us, because it's the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead *in the flesh*.

And then we remember what John said about us being "like him" when he appears. When we think about heaven and what we will be like, the most basic thing, but perhaps also the hardest thing to believe, is that we will have flesh and bones, just like Jesus. We will have *this* flesh and *these* bones.

And in times of death—whether our death or the death of a loved one—this is the most comforting thing: God has not abandoned this body. That very same body that we put in a casket and lower into the ground—when Jesus appears on the Last Day, he is going to raise that body back to life. "And we shall be like him." For now we know that the soul who falls asleep in Jesus—that soul is with Jesus now. And this is good. But it gets better. That soul is going to be reunited with the body, and Jesus is going to raise that body back to life, and Jesus is going to transform that body into his perfect image. We will have flesh and bone again, but we won't be like we are now; we will be like Jesus is now—perfect and incorruptible. Our bodies will no longer be subject to decay. We will not get sick. We will not die. We will not even feel the pains of hunger. But we will, apparently, still get to eat, because eating is great. Heaven is often described as a feast (e.g., Is. 25:6), and you can't have a feast without food.

So our bodies will be transformed, and our souls will be transformed too. We will not sin anymore, and we won't *want* to sin anymore. Imagine that ... if you can. We will no longer feel guilt over past sins, and we won't have that struggle we all experience when we really want to sin, but we know we shouldn't. Even the temptation to sin will be gone, because "when he appears we shall be like him."

Dear saints, this is our blessed hope.

But we still live in the present, don't we? That means we struggle and suffer through sin, temptation, and death. But God calls us to look ahead. He teaches us to consider what is coming in the future. This is very much contrary to the way the world teaches us to think.

I've been thinking about this some, and I'm starting to wonder if this might be the biggest difference between the way the Christian thinks and the way the world thinks. I need to think about this some more, and you can help me with that if you want. But the idea is this: the prevailing philosophy of the world—at least in our western culture—is that we should live in the present. Maybe you've heard that before. The slogan is, "Live in the now." And it almost sounds irrefutable, because what other moment can you live in? We are always in the present moment. But the subtext is that we really shouldn't worry about the past or the future. So there's no guilt over past sins, and there's no worry about what comes next. So you do what makes you feel good right now. One of the basic things this explains is the epidemic of credit

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card debt. But it results in much more serious sins too. We end up making selfish decisions in every aspect of life, and the world teaches us to justify it by saying, “I’m just living in the moment.” The Christian version of this is, “I’ll repent later.” Now that’s not really Christian at all, but I’m afraid we often think this way. So we make a practice of sinning, at least for a time until the Holy Spirit draws us back to repentance. But John says, “No one who abides in him”—that is, Christ—“No one who abides in [Christ] keeps on sinning” (3:6).

Now that doesn’t mean we never fall into sin. Of course we do, and John knows that too. That’s why he said earlier that, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1:8). And that’s why he said, “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (2:1). The point is that the child of God who abides in Christ does not make a *practice* of sinning. We don’t live for the moment as if there are no consequences in the future. Instead, the Scriptures teach us to always live with an eye to the future. This should make us consider the consequences of sin—the impact our thoughts, words, and deeds will have on ourselves and others. But it should also give us the greatest comfort, because we have the most glorious promises for the future. And the greatest is this: “That when he appears we shall be like him.” Dwell on that. Trust in that. Because this is promised to you as surely as Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

“We are God’s children now.” This is good. God has adopted us as his own and has promised us every good thing. So we have this glorious and comforting promise “that when he appears we shall be like him.” Amen.

He who testifies to these things says, “**Surely I am coming soon.**” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)