



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

October 3, 2010
19th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: [1 John 3:1-2](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Hosea 1:8-2:1, 23](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 14](#)
Second Lesson: [1 John 3:1-2](#)
Gospel Lesson: [Luke 15:11-24](#)

Blessed By the Father's Love

Now
In Eternity

What do you think of when you think of the world's great love stories? Romeo and Juliet? Anthony and Cleopatra? I suppose if you're full of yourself, you maybe think of your love for your spouse or your love for your parent or something like that. But did you ever stop and consider that you are actually, really, legitimately involved in the world's greatest love story? Did you ever stop and marvel at that? Did you ever stop and just be amazed that God loves you in spite of who you are? You know what you're like. Maybe it's a good thing that sometimes we just stop and are amazed at God's love for us in Christ Jesus, amazed at what it does for us now, amazed at what God promised it will do for us in eternity. Sometimes that's exactly what we need to do to get through living in a sinful world...be amazed at Christ's love for us, God's love for us in Christ.

John was writing this letter to Christians that he considered his spiritual children that he had taught and that he had nurtured. He was the elder statesman now. He writes because there was a false teacher named Cerinthus who was teaching about some hidden knowledge, some hidden way to get to see God. It's kind of the same thing that goes on in our society today. This idea that God comes to us through water or through ink on a page or through wine and a wafer and that God comes through the Word that's spoken sometimes in a dull monotone from a pulpit...that just doesn't seem grand and glorious enough to society. They want someone channeling a long-dead spirit or some esoteric vision that is given in the night. That stuff isn't new. It's in our society today. That's exactly what Cerinthus was doing and John fights it, not by attacking Cerinthus directly but saying, "Come on people. You know who you are and you know who God is. You know how great is his love." Literally he says, "Stop a second and take a look at the wonderful love God has given to you." This love goes beyond imagining or beyond thinking is what he is really telling us. They translate it that "God has lavished on us," which I think catches it. It's this love that is beyond expectation and this love that is amazing because he calls us children of God. We might take that for granted and we are the poorer when we do because by nature, when we are born in this world, we are not children of God. The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to his will, nor can it do so. We view God as the enemy.

You can see that in our daily lives even as Christians, can't you? When something goes bad, what do we do? We say, "God, why would you let this happen to me?" We

kind of revert back to our sinful nature viewing God as the enemy, don't we? That's how we are. You can see that left in us.

So the fact that God would love us enough to take the people that view him as his enemy and call them his children, that he would love them enough to send his own son into the world to live and die in our place, that he would love them enough to send the Spirit of God so that we can call out to him, that's amazing. That's God's love for us in Christ.

Notice what John says here. Don't underestimate what he says here. He says, "We should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" Exclamation mark, not comma... "if we do this, this and this." Not, "you are a child of God if you love more than you hate." Not, "you are a child of God if you seek to serve God." He just stops the sentence right there... "that is what we are!" This is the gift God has given us. This is not something we do. This is not something we earn. This is all about God and his love. It's not about our response. It's not about our effort. It's all about God.

God loved us so much he said, "Okay, you guys that are my enemy, now you are my children." We think "Of course we are his children. We were created by him." Yeah, but he created mice too. So what? We are his children in a different way. We are his children in that he has redeemed us. We are his children in that he has brought us to faith so that we look to him, not as someone who is going to punish us, not as someone who is going to treat us as our sins deserve, but we look at someone who loves us perfectly and absolutely and has washed away all of our sins no matter what we have done because his love for us in Christ is that strong.

You might think to yourself, "Wait a minute. I look around and I see in myself and in the people who sit in the pews each Sunday people that do not look all that different from the world around me. They are doing the same exact things. They aren't living in the love of God at all times. They are responding in the exact same way that the world does." That's going to happen because we are still sinners. The world isn't going to always know us by our actions because at times our actions will not reflect God's love perfectly. But I would tell you this... people in the world will know us by how we react when we do the same things that they do that are sins against our God. When we flee to God, not run away from him but flee to him for forgiveness, when we know that we respond, not by making excuses, not by saying "It's my parents' fault. They didn't raise me right." Or, "It's the boss' fault. He's a jerk." Or, "It's someone else's fault." When we simply say, "I have sinned against God and I know that I'm forgiven and I go to God and I'm sorry I have hurt you by my actions." When we own up to who we are and what we have done and we say that we still believe that God loves us, that's how the world will know us. That's how they'll see that we are different and that God has worked in our hearts. But when our sinful pride gets in the way of doing that, when our sinful pride still wants to blame everyone else, then the world won't know us and we'll have failed the God who loved us first.

But because God has made us his children, because that's what we are, the more we get close to God, the more we cling to God, the more we grow in our knowledge of God through Word and Sacrament, the more we will respond so that the world will know us. That's the grand and glorious truth that our God lays out in front of us.

The fact that you are a child of God, you have to be clear on what that means. It does not mean that God is going to see to it that everything goes perfectly fine in your life. It does not mean that everything is going to go exactly as you want it. That's probably a really good thing because if everything went the way we want it, we would forget that we are children of God and we would want to credit ourselves. We wouldn't flee to God for help. We would throw all the praise and glory to ourselves that our life is going so well. So don't think that being a Christian or being a child of God means that it will be nothing but glory in this lifetime. Being a child of God means we have something beyond us, something stronger than us to rely on and to lean on when things go to hell in a handbasket. Living in a sinful world, they will. That's what being a child of God is.

Don't hold God to promises he has not made to you. The only way you are going to keep from doing that is if you know the promises that he actually made to you. If you are in his Word and immersed in his Word, then you'll know what it means to be a child of God in time. You aren't ever going to know what it means to be a child of God in eternity until you get there.

Look at what God has John say to us here. "Dear friends, now we are children of God," an absolute statement. This is what we are. "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." Does that amaze you that God says when he appears we will be like him? Does that thrill you? God so often in Scripture lifts our eyes beyond the here and now to when he comes again and he takes us to our perfect heavenly home where we shall be like God, where we will get what our forefathers, Adam and Eve, lost for us. Adam and Eve were like God in perfect knowledge of God, perfect righteousness, perfect holiness, yet they were able to sin, and they did it. What's so ironic is that Satan tripped them up by promising them they could be more like God than they already were. They would be like God in knowing good and evil. They knew what evil was, because that's what they became. You and I ever since then, every person that has been born is not like God. We are sinners and we cannot wrap our heads around a holy and a perfect God because we are sinful. We are flawed. We are imperfect. We can't grasp the divine because we are so flawed. Yet God tells us when he comes again, that's when the full glory is revealed in us and the full glory of what it means to be a child of God. We will be like him. We won't become gods, but we will be like him in perfect righteousness and holiness. We will no longer be able to sin. I can't grasp that concept. I can't grasp the concept of loving other people and loving God perfectly and absolutely all the time because I'm so flawed and you're so flawed. But it ought to just thrill us to the tip of our toes that when he comes again, we are going to be like him.

That's what we should be focused on as we live in this world, with our eyes on heaven knowing what awaits us, so that shapes us as we live for him now. As we live for him

now in going through all the struggles and all the difficulties that we do, how we face them is our “thank you” card to God for what he has done for us. If we face them by saying, “God, why would you do this to me?” We are acting as though we deserve something from God. We don’t. But if we face them saying, “Lord, I know you love me because you have taken away my sins. Lord, I don’t how you are going to do it, but I know you have promised to help me get through all this and I know some day you’ve got perfection waiting for me,” then we’ll be able to get through the things of this world.

We really have every reason and every opportunity to do exactly what we heard in the Gospel today. Our God has come to us and he has given us the fattened calf. He has taken away all of our sins in Christ. He said to us, “I want to celebrate with you. I want you to live for me as a way that you celebrate my love for you. I want this to be the ‘thank you’ card that you give me.”

You and I have that opportunity. In the coming weeks we’ll talk more about how we use our time to do it, but understand this...it has to flow out of how God has loved us first. Otherwise you and I are so screwed up we’ll think that “because I use my time better than Joe Blow does over there, God must love me more.” Get over yourself! God loves each of us perfectly and absolutely because he took away our sins in Christ. Each one of us. We respond because he loved us first, not to make him love us more.

So write him a “thank you” card and let it be your daily life. Live to his glory to honor him who loved you first. And celebrate as you do it.