

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 14, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 370, 372:1, 371, 392, 391.

Lessons: Psalm 4, Romans 8:1-17, John 1:9-13.

Sermon Text: 1 John 2:29-3:2.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Do you remember the word righteousness? Could you tell someone what the word means? It isn't a word we use or hear much outside of church. But it is an essential word. The word "righteous" means "sinless, morally perfect". And "righteousness" means "sinlessness, moral perfection". God is righteous, and has righteousness. God also demands righteousness from us. But we, sinners that we all are, have no righteousness, and cannot be righteous of and by ourselves. Through faith in Christ, his righteousness is given to us as a free gift. It isn't something we earn.

And not only is righteousness given to us, we are also made members of God's family by faith. We are adopted children of God. Believers can be sure of that.

Many false teachers draw people away from their Christian fellowship by making them doubt – doubt God's love, doubt their salvation, doubt the Bible, doubt the apostles, and doubt their former teachers. This is the old question, the old deception, the old doubt that Satan wants to put into people's minds. Remember Satan's first words to Eve in the garden of Eden? ***"Did God really say"*** (Genesis 3:1)

John wants to help his readers move away from doubt to confidence by rejoicing with them in all the things that they could know. In this book of the Bible John, writing by inspiration of God, uses the word "know" many times, demonstrating that a Christian life is not a fearful and miserable thing, but a joyful walk of certainty, for it is built on the sure promises of the gospel that come from God's certain Word. And so it is that

WE KNOW GOD LOVES US

- 1. God is righteous.**
- 2. God has lavished his love on us.**
- 3. Because we are his children, we shall be like Jesus when Jesus comes to judge the living and the dead.**

John tells us ***"If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him."*** So how do we know God and his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ is righteous? In the first chapter of this letter, John talked about Jesus' life and about light and about being in the light. In the second chapter John talked about Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, being the perfect atonement for our sins as well as for the sins of all mankind. So the hearer should recognize that God and his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ are righteous.

Then John makes the application that everyone who does right receives that power, that ability, that strength from God. ***"Everyone who does what is right has been born of him."***

That also tells us how it is that any of us – any human being – can do anything that is right, good, and morally correct. We have been born of God. John just spoke of our anointing, when the Word of God is poured out upon us and when the water of baptism was poured out on us with the Word of God that makes the water baptism.

God calls believers by various names: we are his servants, a holy nation, his royal subjects, priests, soldiers. But the dearest term of all is that he calls us his children. And that's not just an honorary title—he has literally adopted us into his family, making us brothers and sisters of his Son, Jesus, through Baptism. Paul writes in Galatians 3:26 that we are God's children through faith in Christ Jesus, for all who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. Our baptismal certificates are also our adoption papers.

Here John makes it very clear just how it is that we have been born of God, that we are his children. ***“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”*** It is God's love which has made us his children.

John has just told us ***“And now, dear children, continue in him, – Jesus Christ – so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.”*** (1 John 2:28)

When we continue in him, and we follow him, when we seek to do and then do what he asks and demands, then we are truly children of God. When the Laws of God become something we gladly and willingly do out of love for the God who first loved us, then we are children of God and are behaving like children of God. And remember, that isn't something we do by ourselves. ***“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”*** (Galatians 3:26)

We are not just servants. We are certainly not slaves. We are not hired hands just putting in our time for a paycheck. We are children, part of the household of God. He assures us again: ***“And that is what we are!”*** We have been adopted. It has been said of adopted children that they are loved more, because they were chosen by the parents that adopted them. We have been chosen by God and called to follow him. And as his children we shall receive his inheritance of eternal life.

“If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.” Is God really righteous? Is God just? Absolutely. John speaks of the righteousness of God in these ways in this very letter: ***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just – that is the Greek word “righteous” again – and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*** (1 John 1:9)

In verse 1 John writes of ***“one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”*** Here he writes ***“If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.”*** Later John speaks again of God being righteous (3:7) and even later he compares Cain and Abel admonishing us in this way: ***“Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.”*** (1 John 3:12)

If you know that God is just, is righteous, you also understand that every one who practices and does righteousness is born of him. We didn't get that way by ourselves. Mankind by nature is sinful – full of sin and nothing good. We read in Genesis 8:21: ***“the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.”*** (KJV) ***“Every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood”*** (NIV) Paul speaks at length about the way man is by nature in his letter to the Romans, and admits for all of us: ***“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.”*** (Romans 7:18)

John has been urging and encouraging righteousness in life and conduct. He now introduces another motive for such conduct: See how great a love the Father has given to us that we should be called the sons of God, and that we are the sons of God! Christians should concentrate their attention upon that miracle, that we, sinners, should be honored with the name ***“children of God”***. Children of God! Amazing! But it was not always so. When we first entered this world, it was as God's enemies. God had other adjectives to describe our first status—foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved, and full of malice, envy, and hatred.

We have been taken out of the state of wrath and damnation and have been placed into such intimate fellowship with God as to have been born again through the power of his Spirit in the Word. That is the experience of every believer. Children of God! That is what we are by faith in Christ Jesus; sons of God, led by the Spirit of God, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. We read in Romans 8:17 ***“Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*** The image of God, lost by the fall into sin, is being renewed in us.

What immeasurable majesty is ours! We are children of a king! We are children of the richest being anyone could imagine, children of the creator and the owner of the universe! With this assurance in our hearts

we can well bear what the apostle tells us: ***“The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”*** The children of this world do not know and will not acknowledge us. They will consider us beneath their notice, because we are the children of God, with all that this relationship implies. The world did not know and did not acknowledge Jesus Christ, God’s very Son as the Lord. They did not accept him in faith, and thus really want nothing to do with us, his children. The unbelievers refuse to acknowledge the new, spiritual, divine character which the Christians show. Therefore the world can’t know us, can’t understand us because it didn’t know him.

For our comfort, however, the apostle repeats and amplifies his statement: ***“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and 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.”***

Although we have the certainty of our sonship even now and enjoy many of its blessings, yet the full glory of our future state has not yet been revealed to us. But when that revelation will take place, on the day when Christ will appear to us in the fullness of his glory, then we shall be like God the Lord, as nearly like him as it is possible for creatures to become. Then the image of God will be restored in us in the perfection of its beauty; then we shall be holy and righteous before him. No longer shall we then view him through a glass, darkly, but we shall see God face to face, as he is, in all the inexpressible beauty of his holiness and love. This seeing of God will, at the same time, be the means by which the image of God in us will be renewed and kept in the fullness of its glory. That is the certain hope of the believers, a confidence which cannot fail.

You know you are God's children. Christians can take great comfort in the righteous things they see themselves doing. Although our relationship with God is invisible, our faith is invisible, and our forgiveness is invisible; our deeds are very visible. When our connection to the righteous Vine causes his life-giving juice to flow through us and bring forth fruit, we have a chance to see real evidence of our real relationship with a real Savior. It would be a mistake to be so fixated on our sinful unworthiness that we miss seeing the joyful fruits of the gospel in our own lives and in the lives of our fellow Christians. Those good deeds show that we are spiritually alive! Celebrate them!

“We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

What a great fear- and doubt- destroyer it is to be God's children! This is not a patronizing term—the point is not to make us feel, in effect, like babies. The point is to make us feel loved, important, and secure. God the Father has solemnly obligated himself to do for us what all good fathers do for their children—provide for our daily needs, protection, and guidance. He provides us with a sense of being worth something, of being precious. He is there for us in emergencies just as good fathers help their children out of trouble. When we need help, when we pray, we don't have to feel as though we are approaching a stranger. We are talking to our Father! We can call on a relationship that he initiated—it was his idea, his doing, his adoption, not ours. He stooped down to us since we couldn't climb up to him.

Because we are now wearing Christ's holiness, we have everlasting life in us already. We don't know as yet exactly how our heavenly bodies will differ from our earthly bodies. But we can get a pretty good idea that it will be wonderful, because we will be like Jesus. Imagine that—he loves us so much that he kept his body even after the resurrection and ascension, just so that he could remain our human brother forever! Paul says in Philippians 3:21 that ***“by the power that enables [Jesus] to bring everything under his control, [he] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”***Wow! Is this worth waiting for or what? If these are the promises waiting for us, why would we go off looking for something better? What new revelations, new insights, or new knowledge could the world offer that is better than that?

For now, that father-child relationship is not visible to the rest of the world. But even if we don't get any respect from the rest of the world; that is no cause to doubt the Father's love—most of the world couldn't figure out that Jesus was God's Son either.

In heaven we will experience all the joys of being God’s own beloved children! Lord, preserve us unto everlasting life! Amen.