

15 July 2018

## Are You a Child of God?

Text: Ephesians 1:3-14

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Are you a child of God? Quite an odd question to be asking all of you saint and sinner believers this morning isn't it? Of course you are. You are sitting right there, in your spot, listening to God's Word of promise proclaimed to you this morning. But before you are relaxed, I ask you again, are you a child of God?

If you answer yes, then what is it that qualifies you to be His child? Is there something you've done that merits such a title? Does your name on the membership rolls of Immanuel justify your claim to being a child of God? And what if your answer is no, what happens then? Should you care? Do you care? What is the answer?

St. Paul, in his letter to the church of Ephesus, describes the life of a child of God. St. Paul writes that a child of God is chosen before the foundation of the world, they are blameless, and holy, and as such, they are predestined to be adopted by God, making them truly His child in every way.

Now let me stop here a moment and just say that St. Paul's use of words like predestined and chosen before the foundation of the world, does not mean that only a select number will be in heaven. What it means is that, in God's infinite wisdom, He knew before you were made, who would and would not believe in Him. He knew who would be saved and who would not be for whatever reason. He knew who would be His child and who would choose to remain the prodigal forever. So do not let St. Paul's words confuse you here when he uses words like predestined and chosen.

So, listening to St. Paul's description of a child of God, how did you do? I think, as your pastor, that you have done pretty well. You are chosen, a royal priesthood. St. Peter puts describes it this way, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). You are blameless and holy too. God made sure of that when your sins were washed away in Holy Baptism. Yes, indeed, by faith, you are a child of God.

Yet like any child, we are rebellious. And worse, we are not just rebellious, but we are God's enemies, for Romans 5:10 says, "For if while we were enemies..." (Romans 5:10). We dislike God, finding Him to be a somewhat "inconvenience" to us, with His "Thou shall not" this and "Love your enemies" that. So demanding, and unfair. Who is God to judge us? "Just give us our bread and wine and let us go". Our grumbling and bad attitudes toward the church and its people are evidence of our general hatred toward God.

But here's the thing: even as His enemies, His rebellious children, God still pursues us. He doesn't leave us alone. He is constantly before us, calling us to repent of our sins, to confess that we are indeed poor, miserable, sinners and that we have offended Him in thought, word, and deed. And in His pursuing us, He proclaims to us, "I still love you, no matter what you've done, or who you are, or the choices you've made. I still love you and want you to come home." He proclaims His great love for us because that is what our heavenly Father, your Father, who art in heaven, does for His child.

What's more, He refuses to leave you alone and He decided to come and to be like you. To put on human flesh and to live among you. He learned what it meant to hurt, to cry, to experience physical and emotional pain. He too experienced heartache in the death of people He loved. In His baptism, He showed you what it means to die by taking upon Himself your sins, and carrying them for over three years to the cross where He gave His up His life, in love, for you. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friend" (John 15:13). That is what a Father does for His child, to love them even to the point of laying down His life for them. When God laid down His life for you, when He died in your place, His blood washed away all your sins and His death gave you eternal life. That is how you are blameless and holy, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, princes and princesses of the Most High God. It is God's work that makes you His child. You can do nothing to earn it, to force His hand, to change His mind.

St. Paul's text says that as God's children, you receive a great inheritance. What inheritance is that? Well, besides eternal life, that inheritance is heaven. And what an inheritance it is. For in heaven, we will join all the other saints and loved ones who have gone on before us, singing around God's throne His praises, worshipping and praising Him all the time as He walks with us like He did our first parents in the Garden. There in heaven there will be no more pain, no more heartbreak, no more sin, no more death, and no more tears for God promises to wipe it all away. Yes, heaven is the inheritance that children of God receive from their loving and gracious heavenly Father.

But not everyone will accept it. Some will still refuse to believe regardless of everything God has done for them. They will live lives contrary to God's command and their actions will harden their hearts in such a way that they will never repent and receive absolution. Everything else will become a god to them until in the end, God will not forgive them, and they will be forever separated from Him. This unwillingness to turn from sin, or to put it differently, to deny your baptism, is called the unpardonable sin, the unforgiveable sin. It applies to anyone, believer and non-believer, who decides that they would rather be god instead of repenting and accepting God's gracious love and forgiveness for them.

Yes, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, you are indeed God's children, worthy to be called His child because of the shedding of His blood for you on the cross. You are blameless, holy, chosen, and predestined, inheritors of God's gracious and merciful gifts. You are God's own child, so gladly say it. Remember your baptism that saves you when you make the sign of the cross. And believe, that He is with you always, here, now, and forever. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.