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Greetings in the name of the Lord! Our scripture this week is 1<sup>st</sup> John 3.

Ancestry DNA, 23andMe, and National Geographic which works with a company called Helix, can unlock your genetic ethnicity. You can discover which countries your ancestors came from, even specific regions. You can trace when your ancestors came to this country and even connect to distant relatives, if you choose. You may find you have sensitivity to some foods and taste foods differently than another family. [There is a genetic trait that those who eat a mango find it tastes just like a green pepper. I'm one of those people. That's why in some areas, and within some families, both are called mangos.

So, have you had your DNA tested to trace your heritage? What did you discover? My cousin, whose mother is from England, was surprised to find he had Neanderthal DNA. 1-4% in Europe and Asia have this genetic marker. However, this is not an exact science. Researchers submitted numerous personal tests to each company, and none of them came back the same. Some analysis varied by up to 12% of where one's ancestors were from.

A full-blooded Jew, with no intermarriage in the states, had 1% Native American blood show up. When questioned why the incorrect and diverse results, the companies said new algorithms are being developed for a higher degree of precision. He also found some companies divided ethnic people into groups and added a country to a person's results if their group lived in certain areas throughout history.

How many have researched their genealogies or family tree? My mother, who is in DAR, traced her father's lineage back to Captain William Cherry who served in the Revolutionary War. My grandmother's line is both Scottish and English. Dan's father's family, Shea, was traced back to Ireland to 1823, only splitting off from Irish marrying Irish when his father married his mother, who was a Moon/Huber. I have a small Hueber genealogy booklet from 1915. Ancestry is a fascinating science and a time consuming hobby.

It's amazing how many people share the same genetic markers. In 1620, the Pilgrims came to what is now the United States, aboard a small cargo ship, called - the Mayflower. 102 named passengers were aboard that ship. As a result, there are 35 million living descendants

worldwide and 10 million living in the U.S. from a 2018 report. And if you're of European ancestry, you also have royal blood.

Chances are you're a descendant of Charlemagne, the king of Western Europe known as Charles the Great or Charles the 1st. He lived from 742 to 814, and as King of the Franks (a Germanic tribe that ruled present day Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and western Germany), he invaded other territories, and eventually became Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. He worked tirelessly to spread commerce, education and Christianity. It is estimated that all who are of European descent, hundreds of millions of persons, are likely children of Charlemagne. Although this doesn't seem plausible, it's in our shared genetic material.

It's hard to grasp how many ancestors we actually have. We know that we have two parents and four grandparents, but the further we go back, the quicker the numbers grow: eight great-grandparents, 16 great-great-grandparents, 32 great-great-great-grandparents. And if you go back 40 generations, about a thousand years, theoretically each of us has more than a trillion direct ancestors. And since our family trees overlap and intersect, over those 1000 years, we are all part of the same genetic pool. We are family, sharing the same genetic material!

Yale statistician Joseph Chang made some discoveries about the common ancestors of all present-day individuals. His research revealed that the most recent common ancestor of every European today was someone who lived in Europe in the surprisingly recent past — only about 600 years ago. All Europeans alive today — except for recent immigrants — have the same man or woman, in their family tree, who lived around the year 1400. This common ancestor was part of Charlemagne's genetic pool, and through this person, every European has a connection. So what about us?

We're part of this same family. According to Chang's analysis, almost everyone in the Americas must be descended from royalty — even people of predominantly African or Native American ancestry, because of the long history of intermarriage in the New World. Through this complex web of genetics we are all connected to Charlemagne, Confucius, Nefertiti and just about any other ancient historical figure who ever lived. In some way, all seven billion+ of us are family. We all share some of the same genetic markers.

Yet, if we look at our scripture today, a very different kind of family is described. This family is not made up of people who trace their lineage back to the Pilgrims, Charlemagne or Confucius. This special family is traced back through Jesus Christ — to God. It is a family of those “who have been born of God” as verse 9 marks it. We are people who have been born “not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God”, writes John in 1:13 of the Gospel.

We are people who have the same marker, the same spiritual genes, because we are all children of God, because we have the same Father.

Like in human families, “we can’t choose your parents,” and that holds true for God’s family. We haven’t chosen God - - he chose us. We did not call God “Father” first. Instead, he first called us to be his children. We did not earn a spot in God’s family by our good deeds, but only through the generous love of God the Father, which is hard for us to comprehend.

Actress Jeanette Clift George, best known for her portrayal of Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch woman who hid the Jews in the film *The Hiding Place*, tells the story of ‘a woman and her baby’ flying home on a very turbulent flight. Every time the baby cried, the young mother fed the baby a little fruit and a little orange juice, which because the flight was so bumpy, came right back up. At the end of the flight, the carpet was a mess, and the baby looked awful.

At the gate was a young man she thought had to be the daddy – but he wore white pants and a white shirt. Jeanette thought, “He’s going to run to that baby, take one look and keep running!” Of course, he didn’t. He grabbed the messy baby, held her against his white shirt and whispered loving things in her ear. All the way to luggage claim he never stopped hugging and kissing that baby, stroking her hair, welcoming her back home.

Jeanette asked herself, “Where did I ever get the idea that my Father God is less loving than a young daddy in white slacks and white shirt?” God has not only chosen to make us his children, he embraces and accepts us with wide open arms, giving us hugs, no matter how messy we are. We have God’s spiritual DNA we are marked as his own.

So what are the markers on that “God’s child” spiritual strand of DNA? One marker, for a ‘child of God’, is that he or she is growing, developing and maturing. What we are becoming is not yet completely clear, John tells us. When we are finished growing, developing, and maturing, and pass from this life to the next, we will be like God’s son Jesus.

By growing in the image of Christ, we find ways to share the gospel, speak the truth, serve the poor, heal the sick and bind up the brokenhearted. We follow Christ’s example of eating with outcasts, forgiving those who sin against us, and loving our enemies. It means opening ourselves up to the movement of the Holy Spirit and allowing ourselves to become more effective channels of the ever-flowing love of God, and allowing God to transform us - for God’s purposes.

This growth and development happens not only in each of God’s children, but in faith communities as well. In fact, we mature in Christ most fully in Christian groups that

understand themselves to be the Body of Christ in today's world. Having Christ's DNA, as children of God, we must evolve, grow, develop and mature for God's Kingdom.

Another spiritual marker of a child of God is the commitment to holiness and righteousness. In today's text, John challenges us to purify ourselves, because God is holy, and he calls us to strive to do what is right, because our Father God is righteous. The goal of everything we do and say is to be based on God's everlasting kingdom. Yet achieving holiness and righteousness, like God's, seems unachievable.

The key is good genetic material and divine parenting, says Paul in Philippians 2:13, "God is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Paul insists that God is always at work in us, yet our progress toward holiness and righteousness is not about how good we want to be, how good we are, but about our response to God's action in our lives.

We cannot attain maturity on our own, any more than children can grow into healthy and responsible adults without love and good guidance. Like good mothers and fathers who conceive, nourish, nurture, and support their children, God is always working to mold us into the kind of people he wants us to be. Praise God the initiative is never ours — it is always God's!

The world's genetic markers say we all descended from Nefertiti, Confucius, and/or Charlemagne, but the most important genetic markers are the spiritual ones we carry through Jesus Christ. Everyone in the church is a child of God and thus all related to one gracious and loving heavenly Father. Look around and see your brother and sisters in Christ! We are family!

We are blessed beyond measure to be a part of God's family tree. So, praise God that we share the spiritual genes of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Praise God that we are maturing in faith, just like John, Paul and every other follower of Christ who has ever lived. Charlemagne's kingdom spread over much of present day Europe; however, as children of God, we are children of the King of the Universe. So go in the assurance and love of your Father. Live in wonderment and praise. As we continue to grow in the love and likeness of Christ, allow others to see that resemblance in you! Amen.

*Blessings! Enjoy the celebration of our country!*

*Pastor Debbie*