

This is not a hypothetical question. But I solicit your responses. When you think about what it means to be a child, what does that mean?

I was working on this sermon on Friday while the preschool was setting up for their carnival. These are some of the things I observed:

To be a child means to learn through play. For this carnival, there were two huge bouncy houses for the kids to play in and get out their energy. There were games like a ring toss, a fishing game, and a game in which the kids got to throw a ball at a target and dunk the pastor or the preschool director or a teacher in the dunking booth. To be child no matter how depraved one's childhood is to play. Through play is where they learn and they socialize with others.

To be a child means needing help from others to accomplish your tasks. Whether its learning to be potty trained, how to write, how to tie your shoes, how to play on the computer or some hand held device, to be a child means needing help from others to accomplish your tasks. A lot of times you see children cling to their parents because they feel like they cannot exist without their parent to guide them.

To be a child means eating what is provided for you by others. Or wearing clothes provided by others. Whether it's a kid's meal or a homemade meal or food from the generosity of others, to be a child means eating food or wearing clothes that are provided by others.

Being a child is something that all of us share in common. Some of us are children now. Some of us were children a short time ago. And some of us where children a long time ago. All of us share this one common trait. All of us are or have been children.

This is a day that we recognize the importance of mothers. I hear that there are more phone calls made on this day than any other day of the year. Restaurants are the busiest. But mothers would not be mothers if they did not have children that they were responsible for.

So on this mother's day I invite us to ask what it means to be a child. And more specifically, what does it mean to be a child of God.

According to what we read today, this is the message that the epistle writer John wants each of us to hear very clearly. You are a child of God. I am a child of God. You and me, we are a child of God. And I don't know about you, but I need to be reminded of that a lot. Because I forget that sometimes. I sometimes forget that I have a loving parent who tends to me like a good father or mother and who takes care of me. A loving parent who takes care of you.

This letter that we read or its really a sermon which comes to us as 1<sup>st</sup> John was sent to a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christian community. This may or may not be the same person who wrote the gospel of John which describes the life of Jesus. In the gospel of John, the writer is concerned that there is a threat to the community from outside. For the gospel of John, this outside threat is the larger Jewish community.

But in the epistle of John, what we read, the threat to the community comes from inside the community. They are not getting along very well with each other. And the writer of John reminds them of what they all share in common. What they all share in common is that they are all children of God. To be in Christ is to be a child of God.

Many times we lose sight of this. Many times we lose sight that we are children of God. It is easy in this world to get down on yourself and beat yourself up when you lose sight that you are created in the image of God. If you are like me, you deal with those temptations all of the time and sometimes you fall prey to a self-defeating attitude about yourself.

But the writer John reminds us that we are children of God? And how does he do this? The writer John says we are reminded that we are children of God when we love one another.

But John knows that this is not easy to love one another. He cites the example of two brothers to show how families can be torn apart by a lack of love. He refers to Cain and Able, the two brothers born to Adam and Eve. John looks to Cain's jealousy and murder of his brother as a sign of what happens when a family loses sight of being children of God.

When we love one another we show that we are children of God. When we hate one another we are not showing ourselves to be children of God. Children of God love one another.

So how do we, in our community, in the Allison Creek community and in our own families, show that we are God's children to one another and to the larger community? According to John, we are to love one another. According to John, we love one another not just by our words but by our actions.

I want to share with you an email I received this week. It was sent to me by Cheri Curtin. Cheri is the director of PATH. A couple of weeks ago, you organized a day to honor PATH. PATH is the hunger relief agency in York that we are involved in through our donations and through our volunteer work. You recognized the staff and volunteers in worship, arranged for the city of York to designate the date as PATH appreciation Sunday, and fed the volunteers a meal. This is what Cheri said in the email:

Thank you so much for Sunday before last. We haven't stopped talking about it. Please convey our thanks to the entire congregation, as it takes us a while to send letters of thanks (sorry about that).

Again, thank ALL of you for this extraordinary and overwhelming honor and appreciation. This day was unique in my experience.

Cheri

This is a sign of you showing love to another by something more than words but by your action.

I cannot count the number of occasions that someone goes into the hospital or has a death in their family or is going through a difficult time and people in this congregation come to the aid of one another. The times that someone needs something done around their house and people volunteer to help repair whatever needs repair. When you do this, when you reach out to one another during difficult times, you are showing the kind of love that John mentions in this sermon.

John is very clear. We show that we are children of God by the way we love one another. Look around this church. Look around this community. What are some ways that God may be revealing to you that you are to show by your actions your love for another?

Maybe it is someone in this room. Maybe it is someone in this building. Maybe it is someone in this community. Maybe it is someone in your family. Maybe you are being led to show love to someone on the other side of the world.

As you show love to another you reveal something very important. As you show love to another you reveal a child of God. AMEN.

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-I John 3: 1-17

-Given: May 13, 2012 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)