First Presbyterian Church of Soda Springs

4/14/24

We, The Children of God

1 John 3:1-8 - MSG

What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we’re called children of God! That’s who we really are. But that’s also why the world doesn’t recognize us or take us seriously, because it has no idea who he is or what he’s up to.

**2-3**But friends, that’s exactly who we are: children of God, and that’s only the beginning. Who knows how we’ll end up! What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we’ll see him—and in seeing him, become like him. All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus’ life as a model for our own. **4-6**All who indulge in a sinful life are dangerously lawless, for sin is a major disruption of God’s order. Surely you know that Christ showed up in order to get rid of sin. There is no sin in him, and sin is not part of his program. No one who lives deeply in Christ makes a practice of sin. None of those who do practice sin have taken a good look at Christ. They’ve got him all backward. **7-8**So, my dear children, don’t let anyone divert you from the truth. It’s the person who *acts* right who *is* right, just as we see it lived out in our righteous Messiah. Those who make a practice of sin are straight from the Devil, the pioneer in the practice of sin. The Son of God entered the scene to abolish the Devil’s ways.

I’ll be honest; I really struggled with the text this week. And I thought long and hard about preaching on one of the other passages the lectionary offered but, in the end, I decided to stick with this one, because sometimes it’s not a bad thing for those of us who preach to wrestle with difficult passages and expand our own understanding of scripture. So, here we are.

I wasn’t exactly the best kid, when I was growing up; I was a handful and, being the oldest, I was the ringleader of our little band, encouraging my siblings to participate in all sorts of escapades. My mom referred to me as “her wild child,” and I did everything I possibly could to live up to that nickname. Multiple broken windows, too many broken bones to count, either my own or my siblings, which were always caused by some stunt I had initiated, which in turn resulted in many, many trips to the emergency room. These visits to the ER became so frequent, in fact, that my dad joked they should have given us a volume discount, or at the very least renamed the department after our family. And, as long as I’m in confession mode, there was one particularly memorable incident which involved baseball bat and a busted television. All of these incidents only served to burnish my well-deserved reputation as a brat.

Of course, whenever something happened, I’d apologize and sometimes I even meant it. Somehow, mom always saw through those less than sincere apologies and her response was to inevitably say, “you know what sorry means, don’t you?” Any of you get that from your parents growing up? I’d sigh, roll my eyes and reply, “Yeah, I know, it means I’ll never do it again.” What we both knew is that never again really only meant until the next time I got caught. In spite of that, mom never stopped trying and she never gave up hope that someday I’d actually outgrow my wild child phase. And maybe that’ll happen, at some point, who knows.

Now, none of the things I did, or was accused of doing, rose to the level of sin per se; maybe with the exception of my persistent violation of the fifth commandment, but I share this story about my childhood as an intro to what we’re going to focus on today, and that’s, wait for it…SIN. DUM DUM DUM…

In the context of today’s reading, the author seems to be referring to the sin of a group of former believers who have turned away from Jesus and were encouraging others in the community to do the same. This has caused considerable tension and division in the unnamed church and John has written this letter to bolster the faithful, reminding them that God’s love is so great that God calls us his children. Take a moment and let that sink in: What a remarkable statement this is; God, the creator of the universe, calls us God’s children. It’s, frankly, rather awe inspiring when you really stop and think about it.

As we work our way through the reading, the writer seems to offer only a vague idea of what actually constitutes sin. Verse 4 tells us that, “*All who indulge in a sinful life are dangerously lawless, for sin is a major disruption of God’s order.”* The passage goes on to say, *“No one who lives deeply in Christ makes a practice of sin.”* Perhaps he didn’t feel the need to state what might have been obvious to his readers.

Now, I’m not a hellfire and damnation kind of preacher; it’s simply not in my nature, nor does it fit with my own understanding of scripture. Those types of preachers’ kind of scare me, truth be told. Still, the fact remains; sin exists.

One definition of sin is anything that causes us to separate ourselves from God. That separation is always, and without exception, self-inflicted and can go far beyond the teachings we all learned as children when we memorized the Ten Commandments in Sunday school. Defining sin, in our modern society, can be tricky and is often based on how scripture is interpreted. Obviously, there are the basics when it comes to sin; actions that are so egregious that no one with any sort of moral compass at all would ever think they were anything but sin.

However, our society disagrees on many other things when it comes to sin. So, let me ask you, is racism a sin? Is homophobia a sin? Is the subjugation of women a sin? Is the lack of care for our environment a sin? Some will answer these questions with a resounding yes, while others will answer not at all. Others still, will answer yes to some and no to others.

I’ll come back to my own core understanding of sin as anything that causes us to separate ourselves from God. For me, failure to care for the poor, or the needy, or the homeless, or the marginalized, all fall into the category of sin. For me, anything that divides, separates and excludes people in a manner that creates an us versus them dynamic, falls into the category of sin. For me, not caring for this planet falls into the category of sin.

I firmly believe in the promise found in Romans 8:38-39, which reads, *“****38*** *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,* ***39****nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* This is a striking affirmation of the love our Parent God has for each and every one of us, even when we turn our backs on God through sin.

So, where does all of this leave us? When our sins are called out, do we roll our eyes and mutter some of meaningless apology, only to go out and repeat the same sin over and over? Or, are we serious about the Prayer of Confession we pray each and every week? The Assurance of Pardon, offered in the name of Jesus Christ, is not a get out of jail free card, but another example of the boundless love our Parent God has for all of God’s children.

Siblings in Christ, let us honor that boundless love by honestly and sincerely turning away from those things which keep us from God and in doing so, claim our rightful place as children of God. AMEN