

“You Are a Child of God”
John 1:10-18
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W. Glenn Doak, Preaching

John 1 is filled with startling revelations about God and God’s son and about God’s children, you and me! Yes, you heard me right God’s children, you and me. Let that sink in for a moment. You and I are children of God. It says so right there in the first chapter of John’s gospel verse 12. It is in the Bible. And this is not the only place we are called children of God, child of God. In 1 John one of the General or Pastoral Epistles near the end of the New Testament it says, “Beloved, we are children of God now.” (1 John 3:2) In the gospels this is a new idea. Matthew, Mark and Luke in various places call Christians sons (and daughters) of God. Like for example in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5—“Blessed are the peacemakers who shall be called sons (and daughters) of God.” Wow! Child of God, you and me.

John’s gospel has also been called the “Pearl” of the gospels because of the way the ideas and language of John are filled with imagery and meaning. In chapter 4 Jesus says to the woman at the well, “I am living water.” In chapter 3 he says to Nicodemus, “You must be born again. Other places Jesus says to the crowds, “I am the living water ... I am the Good Shepherd.” The symbol for this gospel is the eagle because the words at times seem to take flight. St. Augustine and John Calvin both said, “No one can write like this, it is straight from God.” Phrases like, “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.... What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.... He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”

I have a good friend some of you know him, Ray Dykes, who believes that we are children of God, that each of us is a child of God. He even had ball caps made with the letters WAWCOG, to be pronounced waw’ cog. It stands for “Warm and Wonderful Child of God.” He was in a grocery store wearing his ball cap one day and the check-out lady asked him, “What do those letters on your cap stand for?” Ray said, “It is to remind me to tell you that you are a warm and wonderful child of God.” I imagine that lady smiled the rest of the day. Try that sometime with someone who has a pretty routine job and see if it doesn’t make them smile. His announcement on his phone says, “Hello you warm and wonderful child of God, sorry that I have missed your call.” Ray says, “Some people who are a little depressed tell me that when they know I am out of the town they call my answering machine just to hear someone tell them they are a warm and wonderful child of God.” He often greets people with a firm handshake or hug saying, “come here you warm and wonderful child of God.” He is reminding all of us how special we are in a world that tells us we are on our own and certainly not a “Warm and wonderful child of God.”

His name was Bob and he was a child of God. That doesn’t mean that Bob didn’t have some lonely days sitting in a room staring at the wall in front of him. That is the way that Bob spent most days, staring off into space. Days filled with darkness and loneliness. The phone rings. It will be his daughter calling about the reservations. A clear voice calling out of the darkness. This

call means belonging to Bob. His daughter, Mary Lou, always calls just before the holidays to make sure that everything will be okay. Does he know when the flight will leave? He's flying, you see, to her home for Christmas.

The taxi will come at such and such time to pick him up and take him to the airport. And they will meet him on the other end. Everything is fine in Boston. When he gets there he will belong. And he will share once again in the family ritual called Christmas Belonging. He will see the two grandchildren and hear Harry tell the tales of the latest gossip down at the office on 10th street. "Deck the hall with boughs of holly, 'Tis the season to be jolly!"

And there will be the Christmas Day feast. Just like always. The plum pudding, cranberry punch, pumpkin pie with whipped cream, turkey with dressing and the special gravy just the way Alice used to make it. Yes, Mary Lou does it just the way Alice did for so many years. Oh, the fine time they will have together. Bob content on Christmas Day, sits at ease in the leather chair before the fire. "Sing we joyous all together, heedless of the wind and weather, fa lalalalalala."

But every ritual of belonging is surrounded by the darkness of loneliness. Bob's eyes in the firelight show a hint of tension. He knows he soon goes home to the surrounding darkness of days on end of abiding loneliness, with his family pictures, his TV and his overstuffed chair. You and I in our own way can resonate with Bob's feelings. The warmth and light of Christmas Day togetherness in our lives always has to contend with the surrounding darkness of isolation.

No wonder we yearn to hear the story of light into darkness. No wonder we chant with Isaiah, "The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light." Or, we love the words of John, "The life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not/cannot overcome it." Darkness is where you and I are alone, out in the haunted woods, afraid of the night. Sometimes during those times it is hard to remember that you and I are children of God.

Remember those words I read from John a few moments ago? Lofty themes weren't they! We struggle with this text. Speaking of seeing what cannot be seen, knowing what cannot be known. What can these words from the beginning of John, these lofty birthing words for Jesus have to do with you and me? Is there a word of light in the darkness? Does it speak to our hunger for religious meaning?

John's gospel comes like a bolt of lightning across the sky in the darkest night. It comes like the tiny beam at first light that just barely pierces the night. It comes like the stage flood light that hits Lady Gaga as she steps on stage. John's opening words comes to tell each of us that we really do connect. That the feeling of loneliness and unconnectedness has been overcome. The gap between the reality of where we are and the ultimate reality of God's presence has been spanned. We really are children of God!

God has come down to earth. God has bridged the gap. God has finished the work that was started way back in the beginning before Genesis before the sea and firmament were separated, before God said "let there be light", even before earth was created and there was only a chaotic void—before the beginning God and the Word his Son, planned a world where the inhabitants,

finite creatures, would have a parent/child relationship with their Creator God who was very infinite.

God has come down to earth and finished the work he began waaaaay back then. God has come to earth and this is how he did it. Now listen, because you don't want to miss it. Listen, because you may have lost it in all the ornaments of Christmas. Listen, you may have misplaced it between the trees and holly berries. Listen, because you don't want to miss it again.

God came down to earth in a little manger in Bethlehem. He really did. He came down and the heavens opened for a brief moment and the angels sang and the herald trumpets played and the animals jumped for joy. But it was just for the briefest moment. Then the heavens closed back up. The angels were heard no more. The animals went back to being animals, the shepherds went back to their flocks and the kings returned to their kingdoms. But God stayed there in Bethlehem. Maybe not all of God, but the Word of God did. The part of God that communicates with us, God's Son who had dwelt with God from the very beginning stayed there in Bethlehem, journeyed on to Nazareth and after a while traveled throughout Judea.

You and I do not have to vault the gap. We don't have to do anything except acknowledge who God and God's Son are and believe. God has already made the first move. God has come down to earth. God does not have to stand beckoning us to catch up. God does not impatiently wait for us to make the right move. The move has already been made. We are children of God.

Three decades ago now, when a program we have here at our church, Lay Callers, was just in its infancy at another church I was serving, an older couple had a family tragedy. The wife was dying and the husband could not bear to watch. Their children lived thousands of miles away they would of course come, but not in time to help their dad. The dad//husband was so wrapped up in his long term care of his dying wife now hospitalized that he just had to retreat to his home. No, he didn't want anyone to come with him—he wanted to be alone. So he went home and sat in his dark house waiting for the call. Sat in the darkness, staring at the blank walls. Knowing that one of life's mysteries was working itself out. A team of Lay Callers waited at her bedside until God's hand came to take this child of his, this faithful servant to her new dwelling place just after 1:00 a.m. by the way we humans measure time. Then the team went and spent the rest of the night with the husband, children of God ministering one to another. He told me later, "Just as the pain of the darkness was almost unbearable these people came to the door and said it was alright." He said, "I got through the night because they were there."

Multiply this simple human witness by infinity and you begin to get ahold of what it means for Jesus to come into our world according to flesh. We get through the long nights of loneliness because we know he is here with us, entering the silence and emptiness of our isolation. We are called to belong called to be children of God, called to be a child of God, you and me. Think about that!

God does not, will not leave you alone. He does not intend to leave you alone, ever. That is the fundamental fact of the Christian faith. If you sense that you are in the dark, look up at the stars. One person wrote, "It is humbling to think that the same God who ordered those constellations and flung those stars across the heavens calls you and me his children."

God did come down to earth, he really did. He came in the flesh. The same flesh of a son or daughter who called you the other day to tell you how much she/he loved you. The same flesh of a nurse who helped you last summer when no one else was around to see the tears. The same flesh of a friend at a dinner party who really seemed to hear and understand you.

Do you have the passion to say to someone, "You are a warm and wonderful child of God?" Do you believe that you are ... a child of God? John says so and I hope so!