

CHILDREN OF GOD

Psalm 4
1 John 3:1-7

Faith Community
April 26, 2009

Introduction

The first line of Leo Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* is: "All happy families resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." In my experience Tolstoy is wrong. I grew up in a happy family, but it was happy in a unique way. Family was crucially important to my father. He was the only boy with three sisters. They were very close. My father was a Presbyterian minister, and each of his sisters married a Presbyterian minister. They all took the month of August off, and we went to the same beach on Lake Erie every summer. I know my cousins better than some people know their brothers and sisters. My aunts and uncles were like part-time parents.

During August of every year all ten of us cousins were together all day, every day. We did some crazy things. For example, we would get inside one of those huge inner tubes and roll down the hill that led to the lake. It was great fun going head over feet again and again until the inner tube came to the bottom and toppled over. One time my cousin Bill got in and rolled down the hill. He was having so much fun he couldn't hear us yelling to him to stop. The inner tube went faster and faster as it rolled down the hill, until it ran square into a tree. The inner tube bounced back and up into the air and Bill went flying to the ground. He had a headache for a while but it wasn't seriously hurt.

Our immediate family was also close. I grew up in the days when the whole family ate dinner together at the dining room table. We discussed what was going on at school, who had a date, which teachers we liked or disliked. We all seemed to know what was going on in each other's lives. Being a child in that family was wonderful. It wasn't perfect, but it was very good.

So when 1 John says that God loves us so much that we can be called the children of God because that's what we are, that's an amazing statement.

I

To be a child of God means to receive unconditional love. God loves us whether we are sitting in a jail cell, standing on a platform receiving a great recognition, or hiding with a red face because of something embarrassing we have said.

God wants better for us and always wants us to be closer, but God's love never fails. Remember Romans 8: "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." To be a child of God is to be constantly loved and cared for.

We all know families that have been through the most horrible experiences. A member of the family seems determined to destroy himself through drugs, alcohol or both. The family continually has to deal with lies, deceit, and broken promises. And yet the family always reaches out trying to help. As often as they have been let down, they continue to love the person, even as they despise what he is doing.

The family keeps trying to help in the hope that some day their family member will come to his senses and turn his life around. Their love is unconditional; they continue to love him, but they

don't approve at all of what he is doing. They support him even as they refuse to support his unhealthy behavior.

As children we hope to receive unconditional love. As children of God that is what we always get.

I heard a famous preacher talk one time about the difficulty they had in their family with one of their sons who became seriously addicted to drugs. He said, "The only way we could help him was to love him and love him and love him more. The only way to get our son back was to keep caring for him. He finally got his life turned around and he is doing very well."

Psalm 139 talks about God's unconditional love. It says, "Where could I go to escape your spirit? Where could I flee from your presence? If I climb the heavens, you are there, there too, if I lie in sheol" (the place of death).

We hope every child receives unconditional love. We know all God's children do.

II

As a child in a family we learn what we need to know. Children learn from their parents things like, "Don't talk with your mouth full," "Share what you have with others," "Give up your seat for an older woman," and "Never leave your gym shoes on the kitchen table." These are important lessons for life.

Children also learn from their siblings: "Don't take algebra from Mrs. Jenkins," "As practical as it may be, girls don't think it's cool when you wear a plastic pen protector," and "If you stay out of sight when your parents have friends over, they might forget to tell you to go to bed."

I remember asking my older brother how to kiss a girl when I got old enough to be interested in that. I think I was 27!

As God's children we learn the most important things about life from God. Some are as straightforward as the Ten Commandments. We learn other truths from God's experience with the people of Israel – slavery is oppression, and God wants people free from it; when we are desperate in the desert, God will provide manna and water; people who rule unjustly will be judged by God, and they will fail.

As God's children we also learn from our brother, Christ. He teaches us that those who give mercy receive mercy, that the pure in heart will see God, that those who hunger and thirst for what is right will be satisfied, that God blesses people who work for peace, and that most of the really important things demand sacrifice – sometimes ultimate sacrifice.

There is a whole book full of things we can learn when we are children of God.

III

When you are a child of God, that means that you're in the family – you're related to God. You're not just a creature who was born, who lives several years, and then dies. You are a person created and loved by the very author of existence, the Creator of the whole universe. Do you realize what an honor it is to be a child of God, to be part of the household of God?

Remember at creation when God created human beings and said, “It is very good”? We know that we are God’s children because of the way we have been made: we are made in the image of God. Since we are the children of God, we are in God’s family.

Conclusion

Fred Craddock tells of a family that served as missionaries in a dangerous country. The time came when the organization believed that it was too dangerous for their missionaries to remain in the country, and so they arranged for an emergency flight out. They contacted each missionary family and told them to begin packing. They could only allow each family 200 pounds, so this family had to go through all of their belongings and give away everything but 200 pounds.

They sorted through all that they had and gave away the things they didn’t need. Then they weighed what was left – 450 pounds. Then they had to make deep cuts, give away objects they loved and needed. The father and pastor had to give away more of his books and his typewriter. They had to part with items that meant a great deal to them.

Then they weighed again – 275 pounds. Now every item was a painful parting with things they loved and needed. Sacrifices had to be made by each member of the household. The children cried as they had to part with their favorite stuffed animals and toys. Parents felt horrible about the things they had to give up. Then they got on the scale again – 200 pounds exactly.

They went to the airport with their last 200 pounds of belongings. As they stepped up to the man in charge of the weigh-ins he said, “Ok, we’ll weigh the children first.”

“What? Our children count in the 200 pounds?”

“Oh yes. Step up here young man.”

All of a sudden the 200 pounds they had agonized over seemed like so much trash when compared with the value of their children.

We are the valued children of God.

Amen