

## 1 John 3:1-3 Sermon for 10am on All Saints Day

The reading from 1 John we've had this morning contains some of the most exciting words in the Bible. Let me read them to you again slowly so you can let them sink in:

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God;

And that is what we are.

The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him, Jesus, God's son.

Beloved,

We are God's children now;

What we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him,

For we will see him as he is.

And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Wow! These are amazing words! God, our Heavenly Father has given us his love so that we can be God's own children.

This is not that - God takes note of us despite our smallness and insignificance in galactic terms. That would be amazing in itself that a deity would stoop so low to notice the existence of humanity. We would be honoured indeed above anything we could deserve if this were all it was. But this isn't it.

It's also not that - God has created humanity and now sits back impassively and watches as we make our own decisions and make a mess of his world, although this would also be amazing, that God gives us the greatest gift of life and freedom - what else could we ask? But this isn't it.

It's even not that - God created humanity and retains an interest in his creatures, like a man with a fish tank, watching his fish give birth, breed, die, eat, play; just cleaning the tank and topping up the food trough once in a while to keep the colony healthy. This would be amazing that God retained this sort of interest in this obscure blue planet in a backwater of the Milky Way. This would be way too much to contemplate in terms of undeserved affection and care. But that isn't even it.

Instead God loves us like a Father, each one of us tiny, transient creatures, and his love means that we are called Children of God. But not so that it just be a title, but as John says - that is what we are! The God who explodes our mind if we try to seek out the limits of his time-and-space-creation loves us as his very own children! Totally unexpected. Totally underserved. Totally mind blowing. Totally God.

For every one of us who believes, we are all God's children - his saints - his treasure, the apple of his eye, the pearl he sold everything to purchase, his beloved. It may not always feel like it, and we may not feel worthy; but this is reality. Like a fish doesn't conceive the limits of the tank and the existence of the rest of the outside world, we don't always see clearly. But the reality is that we are God's children.

Not everyone realises it. Sometimes other people cannot conceive of this status, believing Christians are nothing more than normal people following a subjective and irrational faith; but then Jesus wasn't universally acclaimed either – so **we're** in good company. But just because we have limited vision, that doesn't change the nature of reality. God has adopted us and loves us as his own. And that's right now - not just in the future, not once we are perfect, not once we've got our religious beliefs all sorted in our heads, not once we've perfected praying and can memorise all the books of the bible. The passage says, "Beloved, we are God's children now." What we will become in the future is yet to be revealed. We are special now and an even greater future awaits.

What that future will be like exactly, we cannot tell, but what we do know is that as Christians, we wait for Jesus. When we see him in his glorious, heavenly, resurrected state, then we will know. We will be like him. For some of us, perhaps all of us, this might happen after we die, as painful a thought as that is. Perhaps for some of us, it might be before we die. But "whenever" is not our concern. The great thing is that we are travelling, as God's children, to an unimaginable, magnificent reality where we will see Jesus, the one we love, face to face, as God's perfect and perfected children. Again, it's hard because of our goldfish bowl vision, but this is real.

When the passage talks about all who have this "hope" - it isn't thinking of a lottery ticket hope. The Greek word is about expectation. It's more like waiting on tenterhooks for the future. It's anticipating a great dinner that you can smell from the next room. It's watching the miles tick down on a journey knowing that every mile brings you closer to your destination.

And with this anticipation, knowing that we are God's children here and now, waiting to be perfected and to meet our saviour Jesus face to face, we live lives worthy of the waiting. It's not a command, it's an assumption. We will be pure and perfect in future, so why not be that now? We are God's children so we live like a member of God's family. We live as Jesus lived, as a Son of God is meant to live.

That doesn't have to be naive; but it does have to be a conscious commitment of faithful obedience to God and the putting down of temptations which rise up to confront us. We don't do this because we have to; we do this because we are Children of God, now, and this is how God's family acts. We do this in anticipation of the final glorious day when we become like Jesus and see him face to face. It is that anticipation and the knowledge of our identity as a member of God's family that compels us to follow Jesus. We are not Good People, for the sake of being good people. We are not Good People so that we can look down on other people. We aren't even Good People so others can see that we are different.

Instead, if we are good people, we are so, not because of our own personal goodness but because we strive to be faithful and pure before our heavenly Father, and to follow the example of Jesus, his Son. This frees us from the grinding guilt of not living up to what we consider to be **God's**

ethical expectations, and instead gives us a completely different picture of what it looks like to follow God. We don't act in fear, in guilt, in comparison to each other, or to earn God's brownie points. We simply seek to be devoted children and act in accordance with the Heavenly Family we've been adopted into.

My son Samuel doesn't have to behave in certain way in order to become my son – instead, as my son, he behaves in a way which fits our family (most of the time!). And if he lets me down, he knows about it and does better next time. For us, it's not like we have to behave to be God's children. We are God's children, and so we behave as such. We are all saints and we all seek to live as saints.

What an amazing thing it is to be God's children. It changes our whole outlook, our whole reality, our whole manner of being. We all travel to that final destination where the whole of reality will be revealed and we will see so much more than just this reduced world of sensory perception and narrow judgements can possibly comprehend. We are in a reality, even now, which we cannot fully appreciate and one day, like a curtain being removed, like a murky window being cleaned, like moving from black and white to colour, like touching a rainbow; we will see the full beauty of this world we inhabit and the God who created it who loves us enough to call us his children.

If you don't feel like you are one of God's children - perhaps you can't bring yourself to believe such an amazing story, or perhaps you don't feel worthy of it - then come and talk to me. Our God loves us and loves you and just waits for you to accept his love. None of us deserves it. None of us earned it. None of us fully understands it. But somehow the tiny speck that I am on a tiny blue rock spinning through space is a member of God's family. Take a breath in, smell the future approaching and marvel at what it means to be God's child today. Amen.