

Solar Eclipse

The solar eclipse this past Monday was really something to see. The sky grew dark, the temperature dropped, and the world got fairly quiet. From our backyard, we could hear cars honking horns down the road, the neighbor's rooster crowing, and the chirp of frogs. To be able to see the beauty in creation is a gift from God. Once we were in totality, we could see the sun's corona surrounding the moon. Our Heavenly Father really put quite a show on for us!

We see His handiwork in nature all the time but often miss it. God continues to be in the miracle working business. Earlier, we heard a story from the Book of Acts about a time when a man – a lame beggar – was healed by God. When we say “lame” we don't mean it the way we often use it today, as in “loser.” Though, surely the beggar was, at least in the eyes of his society. “Lame” here, means the man couldn't walk. In other words, he was disabled.

Peter tells the crowd who had seen this beggar now walking around, “Fellow Israelites... by faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has completely healed him, as you can all see,” (Acts 3:16). The man's faith in God brought healing and wholeness. We live in the most advanced country in the world. We have access to the best medical facilities and doctors. So often we give credit to the medical field and to our technology, but friends, God is the One who gives the healing – in every case. And He does even more than that for us. He adopts us as His own children. That's what we're going to spend the rest of today thinking about and looking at. If you have a Bible or Bible app handy, turn with me to 1 John 3:1-7. **Read 1 John 3:1-7.**

Adoptions

Over the years I've known people who have adopted kids. Sometimes that can be a mixed blessing. Among other things, it raises questions of identity. Is an adopted person the child of his birth parents, or adopted parents, or both? Over my teaching career, I've known two now young men who were adopted from overseas. Their identities were clouded as well by the cross-cultural natures of their adoptions. In the one case, the boy was adopted from an orphanage in the former Soviet Republic of Moldova, and in the other, the boy was given up by his Haitian parents at age 5 to American missionaries so he could receive needed medical treatment.

In this morning's text, the apostle alludes several times to divine adoption. Twice he refers to his readers as “children of God.” He writes, “See what great love the Father has lavished on 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,” (1 John

3:1). Again, he states we are God's children, in the second verse: Dear friends, now we are *children of God*, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

He makes mention of children again in verse seven, as a name for the people he's writing to. The literal Greek word in that particular verse translates as "little children." If we were to go beyond this morning's passage, the author makes mention of his readers being "born of God," (2:29), and "children of God," (3:10). That's what we are.

Children of God

I want this to be crystal clear to us this morning. The writer is telling us, as modern followers of Jesus, that our primary identity is not as Americans, progressives or conservatives, Buckeyes or Wolverines fans – but as children of God, period. One New Testament scholar states, "this identity is not a mere title but a relationship and a vocation spoken into existence by God." What John implies is that this relationship and vocation is not a human being's choice. No person ever unprompted, asked God to adopt them.

Without realizing it, without recognizing it, even when we're lost before we come to know Jesus, the Holy Spirit is working on us. God adopts Jesus' friends to be His own sons and daughters out of the "great love" that He has "lavished on us." This, of course, echoes another book written by this author – the Gospel account which bears his name. In John 1:12-13, he states, "Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

In our passage today, he goes on: "all who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure," (1 John 3:3). Now that's a tough thing to do, and we need Him to help us do it – we can't do it under our own power. In a nutshell, we should be living and acting the way Jesus lived and acted while He was physically walking the earth doing all the great things He was doing prior to His crucifixion. Through our words and actions, we ought to resemble Him.

Bearing a Resemblance

My siblings and I bear some physical resemblance to our parents. Some of you also physically resemble your parents. Among the generally unstated expectations in my family as I was growing up was that we should also act in ways that resembled my parents. We were expected to bear a family resemblance in the ways we acted, spoke, and even thought.

Of course, as can be expected from time to time, my siblings didn't always act like Bob and Marlene's son and daughter. I didn't either, sometimes. People

periodically had a hard time identifying the family resemblance. Especially as we were growing up, my brother, sister, and I sometimes acted more like brats than Berrymans.

This chapter shows us that God's adopted children don't always bear our adopted family's resemblance, either. The Scripture passage says it in a way that reminds me of another thing we all took notice of in the late 1990's or early 2000's. Remember when McDonald's had the law suit over coffee? They had to start labeling the coffee cups and warning people that it was hot because a lady sued McDonald's because she got burned.

What can you say to that? Coffee's supposed to be hot. Common sense isn't common. And she won the case. Why – John's readers might ask in a similar vein – did the apostle insist that 'everyone who has this hope in Him purifies themselves,' (verse 3)? We might think that some of the people to whom he was writing were not, in fact, acting much like God's adopted children by purifying themselves. John goes on, he says, "everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness," (verse 4). What he's saying here, is that everyone who is committing sin is also committing lawlessness.

We All Fall Short

We all sin. In another letter, the apostle Paul wrote that "all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God," (Romans 3:23). Sometimes we really beat ourselves up over this. Notice what John says next. "But you know that He [Jesus Christ] appeared so that He might take away our sins. And in Him is no sin," (1 John 3:5). Jesus takes our sins away on the cross. He pours out His blood to wash us clean. And then proves He's capable of doing it, by being raised up from the dead on the third day. The God we serve is stronger than sin and death!

Now the kicker, though, is what we hear next. "No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him," (verse 6). Bible scholars struggle to understand exactly what John's saying here – because even the most Christ-like people sin against God and neighbor – sometimes without realizing it! The consensus is that perhaps John is pointing out a clash between our status as God's adopted sons and daughters and a pattern of intentional, on-going sin.

Long ago I worked with a person who said they were a devout Catholic. If I spoke negatively about Pope John Paul II or about Mary having other kids besides Jesus, she would get pretty offended. I once asked her how often she attended church functions, and you know what she said? She attended parish picnic each year. That's it. And maybe an occasional wedding or funeral service. Meanwhile, her personal life was a shambles. She was into drugs and alcohol. She was living with a guy who at least during part of their relationship was married to another lady. And, boy, could she

gossip. If anyone wanted to know anything going on, all they had to do was ask her – she had all the answers.

God Isn't Finished

This is what John's talking about. An intentional, lack of surrendering our lives to Christ, and an assumption that His crucifixion is our "Get out of Hell free" pass. Jesus expects us to grow more and more like Him over time. John's reminding us that we don't go on deliberately sinning against God and neighbor, as if our adoption into God's family has no impact on our daily routines. If we claim to be His, but continue to do the same old sins we've always been doing, are we really His? Has knowing Him really made any impact on us if we keep on living the way we always did?

"Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous," (verse 7), says John at the ending of today's lesson. The apostle is telling us that our adopted big Brother, Jesus, was perfectly righteous. He perfectly loved both God and His neighbor. And God longs for us to act just like our Elder Brother by faithfully loving God and our neighbors – even when we don't like what they're doing, how they look, or how they think.

Another great thing about Jesus is this – He doesn't expect us to grow more like Him on our own. He sends us the Holy Spirit, to take up residence in our heart, and to purify us from the inside out. As Jesus' adopted siblings, we let the Spirit help us transform our whole selves more and more into His image – because the life of Jesus contained in the Gospels is a perfect pattern and example of how our lives ought to look. When we think of Jesus, we often think of His great sacrifice for us during Holy Week, and the hope of Easter. He does everything out of His unconditional love for humanity.

We're also called to love God and all neighbors, unconditionally. Sometimes that's hard. Sometimes it's hard to love people in the Church, who should know better – we think – and should live better lives. In those instances, we must practice patience with our brothers and sisters in Christ, because we know God isn't finished working on them any more than He's finished working on us. Even my flawed Catholic friend from long ago shares our God-given identity, and is dearly beloved. Friends, you, too, are dearly beloved children of God.

Prayer: Holy and righteous God, You raised Christ from the dead and glorified Him at Your right hand. Let the words of Scripture, fulfilled in Jesus Your Son, burn within our hearts and open our minds to recognize Him in the faces of neighbors who may look very different to us. Amen.