

“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” – 1 John 3:1

Last week we had the first part of our mini two-part series titled Living in the Light of Easter – where we looked at Easter through the analogy of a wedding between God and humankind, God making promises to us, of forgiveness of sins, of eternal and abundant life, of life in his presence and kingdom forever. Like a wedding there is a marriage that follows life after the great acts of God and last weeks as we heard from the book of Acts the church is called to a life rooted in the proclamation of the good news – testimony – and a life rooted in the care for all.

Today we conclude our series on Living in the Light of Easter by looking at our reading from the first letter of John that we heard this morning – and we broaden our analogy from understanding Easter as a wedding and marriage to understanding Easter as the establishment of family.

Historically, one of the good fruits of marriage (though not the only one), has been the creation of a family including the potential for children. When Bethany and I first found out we were going to have our first child I was filled with excitement, fear, the unknown – we had talked about having kids but still the reality hit me as a surprise and it when the time came I wasn't truly ready for the drastic change.

Prepared or not, the moment each of my daughters were born my heart began overflowing with love for this baby that who had just entered into my life, and who I barely knew. The first time I heard their cries and held them in my arms I knew that I would love them for the rest of their lives, I would do anything to protect them and ensure they secure, comforted and loved.

In a way, at Easter we celebrate God showering his love upon the world, like a parent welcoming a new baby into their life. At Easter we celebrate God promising to protect, comfort and lavish love upon the world. God's love goes beyond the love of a parent for a child though – because on Good Friday through to Easter Sunday we remember that in his love God

gives his own Son Jesus, his very own child, to suffer a terrible death upon the cross for us; we remember that God raised his Son on the third day, so that we could experience abundant and eternal life, so that we could experience a renewed and reconciled relationship with God. As our reading from 1 John declares, living in the light of Easter we get the privilege to be called children of God – and there is no greater love than this!

This is a wonderful gift to us, it is a wonderful thought that we are members of God's family – that he promises to console us when we are sad or lonely, to comfort us when we are afraid or in pain, to rejoice and laugh with us through our successes and pick us up from our failures just as a mother or father would do for their child. This should give us warm fuzzy feelings – like the warmth of a mother or father wrapping their arms around their child for a loving embrace.

But being someone's child and being part of a family isn't just a series of warm fuzzy feelings, as anyone who has been a child or had children of their own can attest. While parents generally strive to love their children unconditionally, that love takes many forms including expectations and responsibilities placed on a child since they are part of the family. Whether it expectations around chores, how you speak to adults, bedtimes, pickiness at meals – every family has expectations of how children will act, and as children grow up certain responsibilities are placed on their shoulders.

The family of God is no exception.

We are right to be comforted and encouraged by the love that God shows us in welcoming us as his children.... But we cannot shirk the responsibility and the hard work it takes to live up to our calling.

Our reading from 1 John begins with the beautiful words about being called God's children, but it moves on to much harder teaching that we probably would like to forget most days.

“All who have this hope in [Jesus] purify themselves, just as he is pure. Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to

take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.” – 1 John 3:3-6

That’s pretty heavy stuff, children of God have to purify themselves, those who abide in Jesus don’t sin, and any who sins has neither seen nor known him. On the surface it seems we are all doomed, because beneath the veneer or niceness and properness all of us are guilty of sin: sins of omission, sins of distraction, sins of participation in unjust economic, social or political systems, sins of prejudice or bigotry – you name it we all slip no matter how hard we try or how righteous we may be.

Fortunately for us, 1 John provides a far more complex reality of sin and life as God’s children than our short passage reveals. In the first and second chapters, in the reading we heard last week, 1 John states:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” – 1 John 1:8

And later on: *“I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” – 1 John 2:1*

The first letter of John makes it clear that sin is still a reality that God’s children will encounter in their life in the light of Easter, and even sometimes slip and fall – but that even then we have the greatest advocate – God’s own Son Jesus Christ the righteous.

This assurance provides us a back-drop for the hard work of life in the light of Easter, because while the shocking and hard words of our reading from 1 John might not be as black and white as they appear on the surface, they nonetheless challenge us to lives of holiness, of righteousness and purity.

As Children of God we are expected to lead lives worthy of the status, we are called to purify ourselves just as Jesus is pure; we are called to strive for righteousness because we follow teacher and Lord who is righteous.

According to 1 John this righteousness is rooted in love. In the continuation of the passage, from 1 John 3 – the greatest sin is reserved for those who do not love brother or sister in the family of God.

Our calling as Christians is to live lives shaped by the love we have known at God's hands. This means striving each and every day to shape our lives, our small and big decisions – to serve one another, to serve the lowest of the low, to work at respecting other who are different than us, to remove prejudice and judgement from our hearts. We need to live our lives not primarily with our own interests at heart but with the needs of others, the needs of the world, the needs even of strangers and those we would least want to associate with.

Our calling as Christians is to put away our petty squabbles and disagreements, to put away our grudges and our arguments with one another – especially with one another. To seek to make amends with those we have offended, to forgive those who have offended us.

Our calling as Christians is to learn more about our Lord and Saviour by reading the Bible – grappling with our scriptures to learn more about God; we are called to deepen our relationship with God through prayer and times of worship.

Our calling as Christians is to daily strive to put an end to destructive behaviours: our addictions to entertainment/alcohol/sex/comfort, our distractions which pull us and tempt us away from a righteous and holy life.

If all of this sounds like a tall task – the truth is that it is. But we are called to work hard at it, to strive and seek improvement. We are called to work with the Holy Spirit for our lives to be sanctified, to be made holy. The Holy Spirit will complete the work in us, if only we are willing and open to God's work in our lives.

Rest assured, our salvation does not rest on our hard work and striving; our place as children of God does not rest on whether we are perfect, pure and righteous – those were won for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But like a child God expects us to grow in wisdom, to grow in kindness, to grow in love, to grow in holiness and righteousness.

Our destiny has been revealed in Christ, in the eternal and abundant life he has opened for all who believe, but in the meantime we are called to practice this life beforehand, we are called to train ourselves in these disciplines, we are called to live in the light of Easter.

Let us pray.