

Sunday, 14 April 2024
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Sermon
“We purify in hope”
on 1 John 3:1-7,10-11

Do you know who you are? Maybe you’ve had the dreaded interview question, where they say, “Tell us about yourself”. Or you’ve set up a dating profile, and you have to choose how you want to present yourself to a potential future partner. Or maybe you’ve done some research into your family tree to find out more about your roots.

These are all questions about identity. Who am I? Where do I come from? What defines me?

I actually have an amazing resource in this book which was put together by my mum about her side of the family. It goes back generations, and there are facts and stories which all paint colourful pictures about who these people were. And somehow I am related and connected to them. Their lives have led to mine.

I’ve also signed up to a website, ‘23&me’, where they analyse your DNA to tell you about your genetic traits and give you the opportunity to connect with genetic relations.

From all this information I know that two of my great-great-grandfathers fled from their countries: one was Irish and fled to England because he had murdered someone, and another was German and fled to England to avoid conscription into the 1870 Franco-Prussian war. Genetically, I am 98% British-Irish, 2% Italian, (I don’t know where the German part of me is!). And I’m 100% child of God.

Our genetic and relational family histories can be complicated, wonderful and distressing. But the Bible tells us that our ultimate identity is found in God. The Bible describes God as father and mother, and we are given the position of God’s children.

I think sometimes we can forget this, and so I really wanted to focus on this truth today. No matter who you think you are, no matter how you choose to

define yourself, no matter where you come from and who your parents are, you are a child of God and a part of God's family.

When you look in the mirror, you can say with confidence, "This is what a child of God looks like". You can take God's family tree and confidently make your mark on it. You can read all the words that God says about his children in the Bible and apply them to yourself, as if God was writing a love letter directly to you as his child.

The worship series we're currently in is called, "How shall we live?" We've celebrated Easter: Jesus' victory over sin and death. But what difference does that make to our daily lives? And we've rediscovered the truth that we are God's children. But what difference does that make to our daily lives? How shall we live?

The hint we've been given this week is from 1 John 3 verse 3: *all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.*

There are two important concepts here: **hope** and **purity**.

Being an Easter People means being a people of hope, and a people who purify themselves.

Being a child of God means being a child of hope, and a child who purifies himself.

Firstly, hope.

All who have this hope in him purify themselves. What hope is being talked about here? The hope of Easter, the hope of resurrection, the hope of new life and renewed earth, the hope of finally meeting Jesus face to face...

Hope is a characteristic that should mark us out as children of God.

And secondly, purity.

I don't know what you think about this word 'purify' in our passage? Purity can be a difficult concept. I don't know what connotations it has for you?

Actually, my name, Katherine, means 'pure'.

The definition of purification is: to remove contaminants, to extract something bad. The result (purity) is freedom from contamination. Something that is pure is not mixed with anything else; it is clean and free from harmful substances. Clean, immaculate, spotless, pure.

If purifying is about *removing* something bad, in our passage there is one reference to removing or taking something away: verse 5: *he (Jesus) was revealed to take away sins*.

So to be pure is to be free from sin. What would this look like? We get a helpful summary at the end of our passage. A life free from sin looks like loving your neighbour as you love yourself. It looks like loving one another: your sisters and brothers here, and your neighbours who you know, and the people who you don't know, and those who you would even class as your enemy. Verse 11: *this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another*.

Being pure is an impossible standard! I'm not sure anyone can honestly say that their life is free from sin and full of love for others. And if we do claim that, we delude ourselves. But, notice, we are not asked to *be* pure, but we are to enter into the *process* of purifying ourselves.

In our passage, Jesus is the only one who is described as pure. Verse 3: Jesus is pure. Verse 5: in him there is no sin. Verse 7: he is righteous. And later in the Bible Jesus is described as the *spotless lamb of God* (1 Peter 1).

This is the good news: we are children of God now, and Jesus came to take away sins. And as we live our lives as God's children we are part of an ongoing process of becoming more like Christ, until one day we will see him and we will be like him.

In the Old Testament book of Daniel, it says, "*Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end* (Daniel 11:35). We are not expected to live a perfect, failure-free life, but we must be open to God's discipline and correction, as the gardener prunes the branches, and as the metal worker refines the silver and gold. We are in a process of becoming more like Christ every day.

Remember, God calls us his children. A good parent doesn't expect their child to be perfect all the time, or to know automatically how to do something

perfectly. A child needs to make mistakes in order to learn. A child needs to learn from their parents and their siblings and friends. A child who is afraid to try and fail, will live a life of fear and will never meet their potential.

As God's children, we have the potential to be bringers of light to a dark world, salt to a tasteless society, beacons showing the way to wholeness and peace, people who love one another. We have the potential to be like Jesus, and to do great things like Jesus did.

But let's be kind to ourselves, we won't get it right 100% of the time. We will make mistakes, fail catastrophically, hurt ourselves and others, and miss the point. But that's all part of being a child. That's all part of growing up.

We purify ourselves in hope. We're on the way. We're consciously committing ourselves to a life where we recognise our true value, as children of our Heavenly Father, as children of the God who is Love.

Dear sisters and brothers, as we go from here, let's remember who we are:

- We are daughters and sons of the King – that makes you a princess or a prince!
- We are children of Love itself – that means we could not be more loved.
- We are God's family members – that means we have God's likeness inherently in us.
- We are sisters and brothers in a wonderful family – that means we are never alone and we have siblings all over the world.
- We are God's children now – that means nothing we have done, or will ever do in the future, can take away this truth. We are always safe and secure in God's loving embrace.

So go, live as a child of God, learning to love, and purifying in hope. Amen