

Scripture Lesson

1 John 3:1-7

3 See what kind of love the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are! Because the world didn't recognize him, it doesn't recognize us.

2 Dear friends, now we are God's children, and it hasn't yet appeared what we will be. We know that when he appears we will be like him because we'll see him as he is. **3** And all who have this hope in him purify themselves even as he is pure.

4 Every person who practices sin commits an act of rebellion, and sin is rebellion.

5 You know that he appeared to take away sins, and there is no sin in him. **6** Every person who remains in relationship to him does not sin. Any person who sins has not seen him or known him.

7 Little children, make sure no one deceives you. The person who practices righteousness is righteous, in the same way that Jesus is righteous.

Sermon

There Ain't No Sin on Me?

by Nathan Decker

*"Oh! There ain't no sin on me.
There ain't no sin on me.
There may be sin on some of you mugs,
But there ain't no sin on me."*

When we begin following Jesus as a disciple we experience forgiveness, amen? As God's people, the Children of the Most High, we get justified, sanctified and no longer fried. We live in resurrection and glorification, no longer in mutilation by the evil powers of sin and darkness. Put it plainly, we're just better than everyone else, amen? See what love God the Father has for us, he calls us his children. We are the children of the light. We're right, the rest of those poor saps are wrong. The world didn't like Jesus, and that means it's okay for me to be a jerk.

*"Oh! There ain't no sin on me.
There ain't no sin on me.
There may be sin on some of you mugs,
But there ain't no sin on me."*

Unfortunately, the parody and song above is exactly how some of us Christians think, practice, and live. We're faithful at being unfaithful in love. Chapters and verses like 1 John 3 can be easily misread, misinterpreted, and misconstrued to mislead us all in missing out on the mission. Following Jesus is not about being perfect. Being a disciple is not joining a club where everything we do is right. Faithfulness is not being that person who takes the words of the Bible and beats other people down with them.

So what is the community of John writing about in this letter? What do they mean when they use words like purity and sin? What does it mean to be a child of God? Righteous is such a difficult word to understand these days.

A little history of Forgiveness and Baptism helps. As the church we forget that a lot of what we understand about God and faith had to be discerned, mulled over, and chewed on for a long while. Faith is not a meal to be eaten in one sitting. Faith is more like chewing cud. We have to ruminate, meditate, and contemplate every bit of juice.

The writings of the early church in the Bible are examples of folks figuring things out. Baptism, Forgiveness, and Fellowship are good examples. If I sin after I get baptized, does that mean I'm unclean again? If I die and didn't ask for forgiveness, does that mean I'm going to hell? If someone doesn't believe like I do, does that mean we kick them out of the fellowship? We know the answer to all of these is no, but the early church had to chew on it to figure that out.

I'll take "Things We No Longer Believe" for \$300. There was a time when Christians thought forgiveness was a onetime deal. The idea was that Baptism washes you clean. We still believe this. But we don't believe sin makes you dirty again. God's forgiveness is a lifetime gift. So we've been given a blank check and can sin all we want, right? Just as forgiveness is a gift, so is holiness. As Children of God, we strive for righteousness not because we have to, but because the forgiveness we have received sparks a desire to within us. We do good not because of duty, but because of love.

We struggle to understand holiness. We are called to be holy as God is holy, to be righteous. When I hear the word "righteous" I either think of it as a scream at a hard rock concert or as an overly pious word that seems unreachable. In the Hebrew and the Greek, the word righteous is synonymous with just. To be righteous is to seek justice. The Scriptures teach us that God's justice is not like our own. God does not seek punishment but repentance. God does not seek vengeance but reconciliation. God's understanding of justice is not about paying a debt we owe society but instead about grace transforming us to be a better society.

We continue to misunderstand nature of sin and forgiveness. Make no mistake. Sin exists. But Sin is not just little white lies, murders, and hate. Sin is also the continuing of an unjust social framework. Make no mistake. Sin exists, but so does forgiveness.

On the Cross Jesus forgave us all once and for all. On the cross Jesus challenged the powers that be. On the Cross Jesus died because of sin and death. In the resurrection Jesus gave us the gift of grace. In the resurrection Jesus empowers us to forgive. In the resurrection Jesus shares holiness in our lives.

We are God's children (those inside the church and outside, too). Following Jesus is about striving to be completely lost in God's love. Being a disciple means joining in the Kingdom work where love reshapes relationships. Faithfulness is being like Jesus.

Jesus loves me.

Jesus loves you.

Jesus loves everybody.

Because of that love, each of us strives to be like Jesus. Amen.