

“Living Aligned Lives”
Psalm 4:1-8; 1 John 3:1-7;
Luke 24:36b-48

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As we think about the resurrection, it's easy to focus on that wonder of simply rising from the dead. And yet in some ways, it feels like God is not so much just focusing on that one event, but using it to punctuate what God is doing. God has shown that God loves the world and that nothing the world does – in fact, the death of God's own son – can destroy that love. Jesus rising again is a punctuation on that love, emphasizing God's love is still alive.

As we read 1 John today, I see it as an invitation into that resurrected life, into the life Jesus gives us through his resurrection, the new life we find in him. It begins by describing it this way: *See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.* That incredible description that we are loved by God and thus called children of God is something that I think helps guide and define what it means to be followers of Jesus, to recognize what he is giving us – the very love of God.

We live in a world that often feels fairly broken and sometimes we get very separated from our families and we don't have the support of family the way we might have at other times. Or there are times where it just feels like we are alone and the rest of the world is going off in a direction we don't understand. This idea that we are children of God feels to me like an invitation to know there is a place we belong, a place that we are embraced. I think one of the reasons Jesus uses the lost and found motif so often is because it is that idea that we were lost, but now we are found. We are given a place. We belong in the family of God.

I remember growing up, my father's family would always have a family reunion the second week of August at the same park in North Platte, Nebraska, every year. Going there as a child gave me a sense of belonging, belonging to that family. I got to be with people I didn't get to see all the time. I met my cousins. The family felt like it truly enjoyed getting together. The idea of gathering and belonging feels a little like what God is doing with us: gathering us and giving us a sense of belonging in the family of faith as we are children of God.

As I went to those gatherings, I don't know that I realized how much I was beginning to learn about what it meant to be a member of the Fowler family, the character of that family, the nature of the people I met. I looked up to my cousins and my aunts and uncles and began to get an understanding of the world through who they were and the way their lives described how to live in this world.

First John, seems to be suggesting that we, too, have one we look up to to find what it means to be part of that family, and that is Jesus, God's Son. So, we look to Jesus to see what it means to be a member of the family of faith. At the end of the first strophe, it talks about Jesus' purity. That word really means to be a reflection of God's holiness; and therefore, we look to Jesus to see how he is a reflection of God's holiness, God's goodness, so that we might become that kind of reflection. We look to that one who can teach it what it means to be a member of the family.

When we talk about family, we still have a pretty good sense of our immediate families and the nature of how important that is to us. We don't have the sense so much of the nature of the family in the time of Jesus. It was the place one got one's status in the community. It was the primary economic, religious, educational, and social network for someone. We think family is really important, but there's a way it takes a step up in Jesus' time. If you were without family you were without status. You didn't have a way to fit into the economy or the educational or social networks of the day. But in Jesus inviting us, letting us know that we are children of God, there's a way in which we are given a place to belong that is central and defines the nature of who one is.

Even as I went to those Fowler Family gatherings, I realized that people didn't always have the same viewpoints about everything. I knew there were some disagreements. It feels like John keeps acknowledging that we have those kinds of struggles. In fact, sometimes I think the reason we are called "children of God" rather than "adults in God's household" is that we act a little more like children. There's a way in which we still struggle with some of the things that children deal with, including how we get along with one another. I think about watching a young child who has a toy and doesn't want to give it up. "It's mine!" And you know, there's a way in which we still struggle with those same kinds of things.

John invites us to recognize that there is still sin among us. One way it felt like John was describing it was that committing sin was the same as lawlessness. That word "lawlessness" means to have no boundaries, no rules, no sense of edge to what was appropriate or right. The word "sin" means to be on the right path and then take a detour and go off on the wrong path, or to miss the mark. I was thinking about how it sounds like what he's describing is if you are on the right road and then for some reason – and we have lots of reasons: our own desires, some voice that suggests that this is a better way – it feels like we create a lot of off-ramps into havoc instead of staying on that road. When we get off the road into that havoc, the chaos, the lawlessness that sin brings, we have a struggle getting back.

John ever has that struggle in mind and points to Jesus as the one who helps us see the way back, who opens the way. You might say he creates the on-ramps back onto the right road, and in doing so, helps us align ourselves with God's will.

So much of what John is suggesting here is that God has made us children, and now we begin to find out what it means to live in the family of faith, to be children of God, to have the character and the causes and the cares that God has and that God's family embodies. We are given that guidance by Jesus as he teaches and guides and engages us in God's will so that we might begin to take on the character of God's family, the cause that God has for God's people, the care that God would have us show to one another. Jesus invites us to know where we belong and to have a family of faith – a family in which we are engaged, and to which we belong, and that helps develop our character, our causes, and our cares. I think there is a real joy in this. There is a real joy in belonging and in having a sense of who we are as God's people.

What Jesus is doing when he enters back into the disciples' lives in the Gospel passage is inviting them to recognize what he has done, how he has created them to be that family of faith through turning them to God, forgiving their sins, building that on-ramp back onto the right road. In reminding them of that joy, that wonder, that opportunity they have, he's saying, "Now go share that."

This isn't just something that you find and hold onto. The joy of God's love for us, God's love given us, that we are children of God is something that needs to be shared. Jesus says to share it with all nations, all folks. This is good news for all God's children that we might know where we belong, where our place is. Then through God's love and grace it helps remove the barriers of misalignment and engages us in aligning with God's will that we might indeed have the character, the causes, and the cares of God's family. In doing so, it brings forth a joy that is to be shared through service, and grace, and God's goodness.

So as we go forth this week, in spite of all that's going on in the world, the struggles with gun violence, the struggles with getting along and having great distinctions in our nation and in the world, we have been called into a family of faith. We are God's children and there is a joy that we get to share with the world because God's love is given, and we can be God's children. And, we have one who shows us the way, who aligns us with God's will, and invites us to share that grace. Amen.