

Children of God

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast
Celebration Fellowship, Ionia, Michigan
February 5 & 6, 2018

Scripture

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are!
. . . when Christ appears, we shall be like him.*

1 John 3:1,2

Sermon

My father died 21 years ago. I still miss him. He was a good man, and I'm proud to be his son. But here's what matters most. My father loved me. He always loved me, without a doubt. So I thank God for my father. My father was a blessing.

But everybody doesn't get that blessing. Most fathers do love their kids. But too many fathers hate their kids, beat their kids, abandon their kids. Fathers like that break their kids, break their hearts, break their spirits, break them into little pieces. Some of us know all about that. Some of us know it from both sides. God, help us!

Sometimes it hurts so bad that we cry out to God. "God, help me!" We're all alone in a great big world. We carry our pain and we carry our shame everywhere we go. And there is no one to help us. And there is no one to love us. So we cry out to God. "God, help me!"

We feel like orphans. We are orphans. We have nobody. We belong to nobody. Nobody wants us. Nobody loves us. We don't know how to love or how to be loved. And that's when it happens.

* * * * *

Did you ever go to an animal shelter to get a dog? You step inside, and you see a long row of cages. In those cages, you see big dogs and little dogs, black dogs and white dogs, young dogs and old dogs. Some of them just lie there, depressed. Others jump up and down, and they bark. "Pick me! Pick me! Take me home with you!" All those dogs are orphans. And what they want, what they need, is for somebody to pick them. They need somebody to love them. They need somebody to take them home.

When you go to the animal shelter to get a dog, you know it's not simple. You know every dog there has a story. You know every dog there has its own pain and its own shame. You know every dog there has a lot to get over. But you pick out a dog anyway. You know it won't be easy. You know it's going to wear you out. But you pick out a dog anyway, because you just fell in love.

* * * * *

In case you never realized it, let me tell you this. You are here tonight because God fell in love. God fell in love with you and picked you. God fell in love with you and brought you home. That's why you're here tonight, even if you're only checking things out. The Scripture says, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" Here's how that works.

God knows your pain. God knows your shame. God knows how desperately alone you can feel. God knows how absolutely unlovable you are in your worst moments. And God knows you have a lot of bad habits. (Sometimes it's like you're not even housebroken yet!) God knows all that about you and more. But God loves you. God loves you anyway. And God has made you—of all people!—God has made you part of his family.

We like to think that we're the ones who decide, that we make a decision to join God's family. But by the time we cry out to God in pain and shame, God has already been calling to us in love. And by the time we "decide" to join God's family, God has already come looking for us, God has already picked us out, God has already called us by name, God has already taken us home. "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" It's God who does it. Will you welcome it? Will you welcome the love of God your Father?

Tonight's study lesson was mostly about adoption. Adoption can be a wonderful thing. All of a sudden, a child has a home! All of a sudden, a child has a family! All of a sudden, a child is loved! What could be better?

Years ago, some friends of ours decided to expand their family. They adopted two sisters, two sisters who came to them with a lot of wounds. At first, things went well. The girls settled in to their new home. And they learned about love.

Then things turned bad. Both girls started acting out in their own ways. They got into trouble at home and at school and at church. As they grew up, they turned away from their adoptive parents. As they grew up, they got into bigger and bigger messes. And our friends suffered. So much hurt! So much sorrow! How they longed for their children!

But through it all, they never stopped loving those girls. And they never stopped praying for them. And eventually the girls did turn back toward their adoptive parents. No; things never got perfect. But the love of their adoptive parents never came to an end. And both girls—they're women now—both of them still belong to their adoptive family. Because the love of their parents is that strong!

Listen to that Scripture again. "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" So the love of God the Father makes us his children. But that's not all. The love of God the Father keeps us his children.

When God adopts us, he does it with high hopes. As the Scripture says, "When Christ appears, we shall be like him." What God is hoping for, what God expects, is that some day, one day, we will be like Jesus. Jesus is our big brother. He is the eternal, natural Son of God. He is our model.

Jesus is a model son. He listens and obeys. He loves, and he prays. He carries the family likeness. And he carries out the family purpose. What father wouldn't want a son like that? And what father wouldn't want all his children to be like that firstborn son?

Well, God adopts us with exactly that hope. And we try not to disappoint that hope. But like a puppy that isn't housebroken yet, we make plenty of messes. Sometimes we even make messes because we're so excited, because we're so happy, to be part of God's family.

But God adopts us knowing the wounds we bring with us. God adopts us knowing we are damaged goods. And so we kick and we fuss and we fight. We wander and we stray. We stumble and we fall. But through it all, the Father's love remains. And that is what matters

above all. Because the Father's love makes us family. And the Father's love keeps us family forever.

✠

Glory and thanks be to God:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

✠