

## Reflection for 3rd Sunday of Easter by Rev'd Michael Last

1 John 3:1 *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"* (NIV)

Today's epistle reading from 1 John reminds us that our Christian faith is not, or should not be something superficial: rather, it gives us a whole new identity: we are children of God – God's children.

The apostle, however, does not stop there but goes further reminding us that we need to constantly remind ourselves what that means. He exhorts and encourages us to live as children of God. But what does that look like in everyday life? Let me give you two illustrations to help us reflect on that question.

Firstly, the image of a newborn child. When a new child is born, there is often (in more normal times at least) a rush of family, friends and neighbours all wanting to have glimpse at the newborn. What does the little one look like? In amongst all of this activity you often hear someone say – *isn't she like her mother? or doesn't he look like his father?* Whether the statement is correct or not, and I must admit to personally finding it difficult to see such physical resemblances in very young children, what is true is that characteristics of parents, the DNA of the parents, will be present in their children; characteristics that may well become clearer as they grow up.

St John, in describing those who are Christians as children of God, is making the same sort of comparison. If we truly are God's children then as we grow, in spiritual terms, the character and the love of our father - our heavenly father - should be seen in our lives. We should be growing more Christ-like day by day. We should reflect him in love, care, and self-giving in a way that should be visible by those around us, in all aspects of life and not just present during worship in church: visible in a way that is natural, and a way that runs deep inside us, like the characteristics a child picks up from its parents.

One way St John highlights is a deep desire to walk in the ways of God - he puts it like this: "you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin." If Christ came to battle against sin and evil, then we should do the same – challenging sin in our own lives, challenging those times when we put ourselves first and others very much second. Challenging those times when our own goals and desires leave behind broken relationships and pain.

Challenging sin in the world as well: a world that so often looks at things from a very different perspective than Christ would. That will mean at times running very much against the tide and may result in isolation and even rejection. Think of our persecuted brothers and sisters in other parts of the globe. That is what happened to Christ and that is what it might mean to identify ourselves as Children of God.

The second image I want us to think about is somebody knocking at the front door. It is someone you have never met before, but who claims to be working for one of the utility companies. How do they prove their identity? Maybe what they are wearing gives you a strong clue, but they should also be able to produce some sort of identification: an item that usually contains two elements, both of which can be verified by a phone call if you so wish: the person's name and maybe a photograph, and the company they represent.

It is only with both these pieces of information combined that you have a clear idea of the person's identity and can establish their status for doing whatever the job is. They belong to a particular company, they represent that company and, as a result, you expect certain standards from them.

The same is true of us as Children of God – we belong to God's kingdom and as such we represent that kingdom. The question could be asked - do those around me know who I represent or am I trying to keep my identity a secret?

At baptism, we were all given an identity card, we were signed with a cross, and we heard words like this. *"You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever."*

Or as the liturgy from another part of the Anglican Communion puts it

*“Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified.”*

These are words that remind us that following Christ is not something we just do when we feel like it: it is a way of life, it's about a lifelong journey.

We should permanently be carrying that identity card in a way that is visible for all to see, and shows that we are proud to live by what it represents.

*“Let no one deceive you, my children! Whoever does what is right is righteous, just as Christ is righteous”*

Again, we are called to copy Christ - God's own son.

You and I are children of God not because we deserve to be or have any right to be. We are children of God because of God's love for us. It is as a result of that love that Christ died to save us and claim us for his own.

The question each of us must struggle with is what does that new identity mean? Am I proud of it? – because I should be.

And if we are proud of it can our heavenly father be seen in us? Do those who look at us say *look he is like his Father* – his heavenly Father.

It's a very challenging question. Our struggle in the Christian life with the help of the Holy Spirit and the encouragement of the church around us is to make that a growing reality in each of our lives.

*“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”*

May it become a growing and visible reality in each of our lives.