

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota
 April 22, 2012

1 John 3:1-7
 Luke 24:36b-48
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

All this week I have been running into people who have in one way or another shared with me **huge and troubling circumstances in the lives of their children**. Some of these problems may have been brought on by the children/young adults themselves. Others have been victimized by other people or have suffered from natural calamities. No matter what, it is a tough world out there and the average parent spends a lot of time **advocating for** and **praying for** their kids-still-at-home or even for their kids-long-since-grown and gone. We love our kids and when they hurt we hurt.

From these recent conversations and many more, I am convinced that a whole lot of parents keep on loving their children almost no matter what they do. Parents will go to almost any length to help their children have a good life. Parents keep loving kids even when the kids announce that they hate their parents. If human parents can be so gracious, forgiving, loving and committed, **would you expect any less from our Father, God?**

The writer of 1 John puts it like this. **“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.”**

How do you feel about your kids, grandkids or beloved nieces and nephews? What could they possibly do that might make you stop loving them? How does God feel about God’s kids?

- When our lives are going well?
- When we are struggling?
- When we are mistreated?
- When we mistreat others of God’s kids?

Does God hurt when we hurt?

How did Jesus feel when God’s people were shouting, **“Crucify him?”** When they said, **“We don’t know Jesus.”** When they said, **“I’ll sell Jesus out for money.”** How did God feel when Jesus gasped out, **“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?”** On the other hand, how excited was God to meet those early Christians at that **empty Easter tomb?** How excited was God to tell them that sin, death and the power of **evil didn’t win?** How did Jesus feel when he was able to share a **fish**

breakfast with them after the grave? How did God feel when God **commissioned us to follow Jesus** in service to God's creation and people? How does God feel **when we actually do follow Jesus?**

Here's what happened according to our Gospel lesson from **Luke 24**. Easter morning the women came and received word that Jesus had risen from the dead. They went and told the men who didn't believe them. Later that afternoon Jesus appeared to two male followers on the Road to Emmaus. Now, Easter night, Jesus appears to the whole group. Did you catch his first words again in this Gospel? "**Peace be with you.**" And their reaction? "**Startled, terrified** and **doubts.**" The account goes on, "**While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat...?'**" Those folks then gave Jesus some fish and he ate it... The next thing you know those same shaking-in-their-boots disciples are out following his command that "**repentance and forgiveness be proclaimed in his name to all nations.**" You maybe better watch just who you share your fish with... Do you suppose the fish was lutefisk?

Did you see? **Joy and disbelief can exist together in God's children.** Those early believers were **hopeful but uncertain.** Easter isn't about how well they were hanging onto God. Easter is all about **how well God is hanging onto them and us!** Easter is all about God's **amazing gift** to all of humanity. Easter is all about **what God alone can do** in and through people. Easter is all about **God loving us to God's death** at the hands of God's own children and then coming back and saying, "**I still love you.**" Maybe God can still love-less-than-perfect believers, less than perfect followers of Jesus? Maybe God loves me and you...

Has Jesus ever met you on the lake, in the deer stand, at the office? Have you noticed him there with you? Have you shared some fish with Jesus? Has Jesus shared some fish with you? Has Jesus ever sat and listened as you poured your heart out about one of your kids? Have you told anyone that Jesus sits in your deer stand with you? Has Jesus maybe been sitting in some distant place with your beloved child too?

You may have heard me say this before and you will likely hear me repeat this again. I shared this insight with three different people this past Friday alone. On any given Saturday/Sunday when I am up here preaching, I've got it figured that about every third person sitting out here in front of me has

some major crisis going on in their lives. You all look fine, spit-shined and polished, but underneath the nice clothes and smile on your face dwells some tough struggle that is weighing heavy on your soul. And sometimes the same is true of the guy who is standing up front doing the preaching. It is just a matter of whose turn it is this week. Then, what will that person do with the problem. Will they ask God for help? And then, is there any way that Jesus will use us, sisters and brothers in Christ to help?

The author of 1 John says, **“Beloved, we are God’s children now. What we shall be has not yet been revealed.”**

- **Beloved** – that’s how God feels about each and all of us, just the way that we are right now.
- **God’s children**- that’s who we belong to, no matter what.
- **What we shall be** – that’s our beloved God’s dream for our lives. We are not already there. We are on God’s way for us.

John goes on, **“What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him.”**

- **Do know** - That’s Jesus’ promise to us.
- **Revealed** - Jesus is coming again and God’s love will be very clear.
- **Like him** – Wow, what does that mean? Does that mean precious to the Father? Does it mean at peace with God, our neighbor and the world? Does it mean safe and sound in God’s care? Does it mean beloved and loving forever?

The water on our lakes has surfaced from beneath a foot of ice. The trees apparently dead are budding out. Lilies are poking through hard ground behind the church. This is how God has created the world to be renewed again and again. Does God do that kind of work with people too, renewed again and again? **God has faith in you. Do you have faith in God?**

I have another piece involving **“HANDS.”** It goes like this:

A **basketball** in my hands is worth about \$20.00. A basketball in the hands of Lebron James is worth millions. It depends whose hands it is in. A **baseball** in my hands is worth about \$7.00. A baseball in the hands of C.C. Sebatia is worth millions. It depends on whose hands it is in. A **tennis racket** is useless in my hands, but in Venus or Serena William’s hands it is worth millions. It depends whose hands it is in.

A **rod** in my hands will keep away an angry dog, but in Moses’ hands it parted a mighty sea to free God’s people. It depends on whose hands it’s in. A **slingshot** in my hands is a kid’s toy. For David it became a mighty

weapon to take down a giant. **Two fish and five loaves** in my hands is a couple of fish sandwiches. Two fish and five loaves in Jesus' hands will feed thousands. **Nails** in my hands might produce a birdhouse. Nails in the hands of Jesus have produced salvation for the whole world. It depends upon whose hands they are in.

As you can see, it depends whose hands we are in. So, put your concerns, your worries, your fears, your hopes, your dreams, your family and your relationships into God's hands because it depends whose hands we are in.

We care an awfully lot about our kids. So does God. **"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are... Beloved, we are God's children now, what we will be has not yet been revealed... when he is revealed, we will be like him..."** And God's faithful and loving work in our lives all starts again today. Thanks be to God. Amen.