

Green Hill Presbyterian Church
“What We Know and What We Don’t”
Thomas G. Speers, III
Easter 3—April 15, 2018

Lesson: 1 John 3: 1-3

What do you want to be when you grow up? Do you remember that question, asked of a child, and responded to with wonderful if outlandish answers like: I want to be an astronaut; I want to be a fire fighter or a teacher or a race car driver or maybe even the president? I suspect that most of the kids who answer this question don’t actually end up doing what they suggest at the age of four or five or six. What do you want to be when you grow up? The honest answer is that we don’t know. We don’t know because we don’t know the future. We don’t know what the future will hold. We don’t know if we will live in the same place or if we’ll stay single or get married or have a big family or become a doctor. We don’t know what we will be.

What we do know is who we are right now. John writes to the church: “Beloved, we are God’s children now.” That is who we are. I’d like to suggest today that this knowledge can actually reshape our world. We are God’s children now. Don’t ever forget that reality. When we claim our true identity as God’s children, then we can face any trial, any challenge, any circumstance.

This past Thursday was Holocaust Remembrance Day, a time when people around the world remember the horrors of the Holocaust and in that remembering vow that never again shall we stand by as millions of our sisters and brothers are slaughtered. I’m deeply grateful to Bruce Fine for including Randall Stroope’s *Inscription of Hope* in the service today. In Cologne, Germany, in a basement where Jews were hiding from the Nazis, a child wrote these words:

I believe in the sun
even when it is not shining
and I believe in love
even when there's no one there
and I believe in God
even when he is silent
I believe through any trial
there is always a way.¹

Those are words written by someone who knew she or he was a child of God. When we claim our true identity as God’s children, then we can face any trial, any challenge, any circumstance, any horror. There is always a way. We are God’s children now.

Friday night, one hundred twenty five people gathered in this sanctuary to claim their full identity as children of God. They might not use those exact words but they represented a marvelous breadth of humanity—from *Yale to Jail* as one friend told me—people of every stripe and experience and outlook. They couldn’t meet downstairs because of the Flea Market so wonderfully, even providentially, they filled this space. They shared a common understanding that they have become powerless over alcohol and their lives have become unmanageable and they have come to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore them to sanity. Sounds like they are claiming their rightful place as children of God. I’m

¹ From Z. Randall Stroope, *Inscription of Hope* © 1994 Heritage Music Press.

proud that Green Hill Church hosts one of the largest Alcoholics Anonymous gatherings in the whole state of Delaware. See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God and that is what we are.

In a world that is altogether too divided and too eager to put us down, to separate us, to tell us that we are not good enough, or smart enough, or beautiful enough, that we don't come from the right places or think the right way, we proclaim that we are children of God. Wonderful Desmond Tutu, in accepting the Union Medal from Union Seminary in New York spoke of his own experience of claiming our true identity: "In the face of apartheid which declared that we were made for apartness, for alienation, for hostility, we were able to declare that the Bible and Christianity asserted unequivocally that we were created for togetherness, for family, for harmony, that in Christ there was neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, that this Jesus was our peace, who broke down the middle wall of partition and describing his impending death on the Cross which John described as Jesus being glorified, said, 'If I be lifted up will draw all to me'. He did not say some. He said all – all are insiders, all belong – white, black, red, yellow, Arab, Jew, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, young old, male, female, rich, poor, gay, lesbian and so-called straight – all belong. This Jesus called those one of whom had betrayed him, another denied him, not once but three times and all of whom had forsaken him he called them staggeringly 'my brothers', belonging to the family that called God Father. It is mind blowing and to think that God has no enemies, all without exception are God's children."²

We are God's children now. That is what we know. What we will be has not yet been revealed. We don't know what the future will be. We don't know what this church will look like in five or fifteen or fifty years. We don't know what we will look like. We don't know who the next pastor will be or who the next leaders will be. We don't know if we will be astronauts or engineers or race car drivers. There is no reason for fear amidst that ignorance, because John explains, we will be like Jesus. This is how Eugene Peterson translates our passage: "What we know is that when Christ is openly revealed, we'll see him—and in seeing him, become like him. All of us who look forward to his Coming stay ready, with the glistening purity of Jesus' life as a model for our own."³ We sometimes suggest that long married couples begin to resemble each other after many years of living together. So claiming our identity as God's children now allows us to develop that long time relationship with the one who loves us, so that we actually begin to resemble Jesus who will come.

We don't know the future but we do know that we are God's children now. So dear friends, we too can claim with the children hiding in Cologne:

We believe in the sun
 even when it is not shining
 and we believe in love
 even when there's no one there
 and we believe in God
 even when God is silent
 We believe through any trial
 there is always a way.

² Desmond M. Tutu, The Explosiveness of the Scriptures, Union Medal Address, Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 16 May 2006.

³ Eugene H. Peterson, The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language. NAV Press. © 2002.

Let us pray: Lead us, Creation's Architect, into all those places where we will discover your hope waiting to nourish and restore our famished souls. Lead us, Shepherd of little children into all those places where we may have the joy of filling the emptiness of others with your goodness. Lead us, Spirit of Goodness, into all those places where deeds of kindness and hands overflowing with mercy speak louder than platitudes. God in Community, Holy in One, lead us into your kingdom where we can claim our true humanity as your beloved children. Amen.⁴

⁴ Prayer adapted from <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/> © Thom M. Shuman. April 22, 2018.