

"The Joyful Confession Made by Faith"

1 John 3:1-2

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4 Easter B

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Boise, Idaho

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The Word of the Lord from I John 3: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Today is confirmation Sunday here at Good Shepherd, and so we have welcomed Kevin and Ben into communicant membership. It is good for all of us to witness the rite of confirmation, to hear the vows and to remember what we all confirm as Christians gathered here by the Holy Spirit. Now, to confirm is to confess—to say the same thing that God says. So let’s take a look at our epistle for today and see what our Lord says, so that we can say the same thing.

I. The Joyful Confession

This short text is brimming with Good News: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” Did you hear? God deals with us in love and calls us His children.

He deals with you in love. He does not deal with you in anger, saying, “You’ve got one more chance to shape up before I drop the hammer. He doesn’t deal with you in fairness, saying, “I’ll help you out as much as you help Me.” He doesn’t deal with you on a contractual basis: “I’ll give you one blessing for every five good deeds you do.” No, He deals with you in love. He declares, “Love equals hard work, service to others. I love you so much that I’ve worked hard for your salvation: I’ve given My Son up to death on the cross in order to save you from your sin.” Furthermore, His love is ongoing—He hasn’t stopped loving you. He gives you all that you need for life today. He gives you all that you need to live today. He does this out of His love and mercy for you.

Furthermore, He calls you His children. He doesn’t call you His enemy, even though you were born as an enemy of God (Romans 5:10), naturally doing exactly what He commanded you not to do. Rather than defeat you as an enemy, God gave His Son to make you His child. Rather than destroy you, for Jesus’ sake He gives you life forever. Nor does God call you a foreigner: He doesn’t say, “I’m neither for you nor against you, so go ahead and take care of yourself.” Nor does God call you His servant: He doesn’t say that you earn your keep, and He rewards you by how hard you work.

He calls you His child. He’s made you His child for Jesus’ sake. He’s borne you into His family—not by your labor, but by His work in Holy Baptism. As a Father, He’s declared His Word to you, teaching you about matters of life and death. He’s given you His commands, so that you know the rules of the house. He’s told you about His love for you in Jesus. As a Father, He’s promised to keep speaking to you in His Word, and He promises to keep you fed.

And what does He do to you if you disobey Him? He keeps providing for you—He keeps telling you to repent and keeps giving you forgiveness. He keeps providing forgiveness to keep you as His child. That’s what a loving Father does for His kids. What does He do if you run away? He pursues you, inviting you back at every opportunity. That’s what a loving Father does.

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God.” This is, by the way, the theme of the family handbook—you probably know it as the Small Catechism. You learned the Ten Commandments to learn the house rules—and how much you need to be forgiven for not keeping them. You learned the Creed to learn about the God who has sacrificed to make you His child forever, and how He provides for all your needs of body and soul. You learned the Lord’s Prayer, to learn how children speak to their Father who is in heaven. You learned about Baptism, how you were born into the family and live in the family. You learned about the Office of the Keys and Confession, so that you might be sure that the Lord keeps speaking His Word of life to you. And you learned about the Lord’s Supper, where He feeds you His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, unto life everlasting. (And you’ve kept on reviewing these doctrines, long after you confirmation day.)

You’re children of God. That’s what the confirmands said today in those confirmation vows. That’s what you confessed today by faith. That’s what we all confessed today, and here’s the Good News: God says the same thing about you, too.

II. By Faith

You’re God’s children, right now. It’s not a future thing, but right now you’re sons and daughters of the king. In Christ, you’ve already conquered the world. For His sake, the kingdom of heaven is already yours.

Here’s the tough part: “Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.” Because the world doesn’t believe in Jesus, it’s not going to honor you as His children. Look at our first lesson from Acts 4 today. Peter and John have just been on trial: for what? For healing a man in the name of Jesus, and then telling the crowd that Jesus was raised from the dead for their salvation. This should be a cause for celebration, but those who rejected Jesus found no joy. Instead, they threatened Peter and John, telling to stop healing people and preaching about salvation in the Lord. They didn’t want miracles or eternal life.

It’s still the same. The world doesn’t know Jesus, so it doesn’t know you. It doesn’t get you and your faith. It doesn’t understand why you’d go to confirmation classes instead of the mall or soccer practice, because it knows about soccer and shopping but it doesn’t know about Jesus. It doesn’t understand why you’d preserve the life of the unborn, even when that child has Downs Syndrome, because it doesn’t know the Author of life. It doesn’t understand why you’d resist immoral temptations that would make your life more fun, because it has no faith in Christ or eternal life that He brings. The world is self-serving: it has to be, because it’s rejected the only true God to serve. Therefore, it’s not going to understand you. For your efforts to help the unborn or stand for morality, you’re going to be considered a kook.

So you live by faith. The world doesn’t know you, but God does. In His love, He’s made you His beloved child. He supplies strength to endure. He forgives your sins for Jesus’ sake, and He

promises you everlasting life.

Be aware that the world has a willing ally close to home—your old sinful nature. Your Old Adam doesn't get you, either; and he's going to make the most of every opportunity to work you over. Sometimes, you're going to make a mistake—one that brings with it a lot of shame and consequences. The embarrassment will be thick enough to taste, and it's not going to feel good to be you; this may never be more true than when you're a teenager, where little mistakes can add up to lifelong consequences. Old Adam will get a hold of this and jab you with it, trying to persuade you that you're either too rotten to be God's child, or that God must be to blame if He let you mess up so badly. He'll do his best to make you despair. But you live by faith; and by faith you remember the love that the Father has given to you for Jesus' sake. You know you have God's Word that He calls you His beloved child. If you have misused the freedom He has given you in order to sin, that is not His fault, but solely yours; and yet He still loves you. For even though you may be unfaithful, the Lord is faithful to you. He who did not spare His own Son to make you His will not forsake you now, but stands ready to forgive.

Sometimes, things are going to happen—bad things. Whether you're in high school or a great-grandparent, tragedies are always possible. The world and Old Adam are going to team up to declare that you must have a worthless Lord if such things would happen to you. But you live by faith. Even as the world mocks your sorrows, you know by God's Word that your sorrows are part of this world which is passing away. By faith, you know of the love that your Father has given unto you. You're His child, and so His kingdom of heaven is your kingdom forever.

Sometimes, thanks to Old Adam, you're going to like that world that doesn't know Jesus—you're going to like it better than the Lord who has redeemed you. The temptations are many. You know your weaknesses better than anyone else, and they are too often measured not by how hard you resist them but by how much you indulge them. If sin were always terrifying and its wages evident, this would be less than a problem; but all too often sin looks necessary if you're "really going to live your life" in this world. Old Adam will make grace and eternal life look boring and burdensome, sin interesting and desirable. But you know better. You live by faith. Despite the pleasures that this world promises, you know that they will pass away with the world, and a better kingdom is yours. Behold God's love for you: He's made you His child, and the kingdom of heaven is yours.

That's what God says to us in today's epistle, and that's what we rejoice to confess—to say with Him. You're going to see a lot of stuff in this world—some that seeks to seduce you from your Savior, some that seeks to repel you from Him. But by God's grace, you know better. For now, you live by faith—but the Lord is at hand. He is as near as His Word, declaring that you are His for Jesus' sake. This is so, because He has washed you by water and His Word in Baptism, so that you might be His child forever. He feeds you His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins; present to forgive, though unseen. But for Jesus' sake, you are children of God. His kingdom is yours, and you will see Him in His glory: because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen