

A CHILD OF GOD

The death and resurrection of Jesus, which should have affirmed the disciples' faith, turned out to be the opposite. They were all afraid because of the fear of the religious leaders and the other authorities at the time. However, when they were filled with power according to the reading in Acts 3:12-19, they were confident in sharing and testifying in the presence of these authorities about the same thing the authorities killed Jesus for. Who has ever thought Peter could preach and, at the beautiful gate, had the power to heal in the name of Jesus? Who is Peter to have such boldness to stand before the authority to testify about who Jesus is?

We know him: the one Jesus called to walk on the sea, doubted and sunk (Matthew 14:22-33). In the synoptic gospels, Christ prophesies that Peter will deny him three times, (Luke 22:55-62; Matthew 26:69-75 and Mark 14:66-72), and he does so, coming to feel guilt for his human weakness. Yes, we know all these about him, and so what? The difference here is that Peter encountered the truth and was empowered by the spirit of God, which changed the narrative of his past. He recognises his new identity in Christ, A CHILD OF GOD. When he encountered the truth about the resurrection and allowed the Holy Spirit into his life, his past had no power over him. Our encounter with God changes our destiny and prepares us to face the present and future confidently. Jesus offers us a gift of salvation, enabling us to live as God's transformational representatives in creation.

Jesus' gift of salvation is sometimes misunderstood and taken as power that enslaves; rather, it liberates and restores our true identity. In the same way, Jesus had opposition and was misunderstood by nearly everyone around him, and Christians must learn to expect the same. This opposition is not a happy thought for many of us, who want so much to fit in and to be appreciated by everyone around us. But John is uncompromising: if we are the children of God, the world will not know or understand us. It is as if we have a choice. Either we enjoy the love of the world and the respect of our contemporaries, or we let the love of God claim our lives. If we give our lives to God to become children of God, then we really should expect that many people today will have trouble understanding our values and our sense of identity as children of God. In 1 Jn, which was written with the conviction that the world was coming to an end and Jesus would be appearing soon, dividing the children of

God from the children of the devil. This eschatological anticipation shapes all the assurances and admonitions of the letter. John emphasises that our identity as God's children builds the foundation for God's love for the faithful. The fact that the world opposes believers should assure them that they are God's children God. (the world does not mean a created order but the structures, assumptions, and communities that turn from the God revealed in Jesus Christ.)

In a culture of individualism, we belong to a community, the body of Christ. In an age that seeks security through violence, we seek solidarity, forgiveness and peace. In a society that finds personal identity through social networking, we find our true name in baptism and following Christ. Our birth certificate states our natural identity, and our baptism certificate declares our true identity. We are loved, claimed, and redefined as nothing less than God's children.

In a deeper sense, we don't understand ourselves because we live with double identities, old and new. We look at ourselves and know that the old identity is too plain to ignore and too powerful to escape. Its grip pulls us down in despair. Encased in our past, we think the new identity is too good to be true. We look into our hearts honestly and with fearless self-searching, and we have to say, "A child of God? Not me!" That is the factual or experiential truth about us, which John does not deny. The truth is God's love has staked a claim on us that overwrites the truths we think we know from experience. We experience our brokenness, but God's truth declares us whole. We experience a lingering grip of sin, but God's truth declares us holy. We experience impurity, but God is purifying us. God's truth is more true than ours because it is a deeper truth, a final truth not of what is but of what shall be. It is the truth of grace that is greater than our sin.

John points that out clearly in our reading: *"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The world does not know us because it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now"* (1 John 3:1-2a).

John seems concerned, emphasising that we should be confident in our identity in Christ, the new identification should encourage us to have a deeper relationship with God. A child of God is a connection that allows you to communicate with God and a recognition that

should change our perception about how we see and approach God. A recognition that should solidify God's love for you. John realises that this new identity is difficult for some to accept, so he emphasises, please, my brothers and sisters, "*let no one deceive you.*" (1 Jn. 3:7a).

Let no one or circumstances deceive you that you are not accepted here as a child of God. Let not your past speak negativity to your present status in Christ; let not allow the negative comments and discouraging statements to determine your identity. Be confident in Jesus that you have been claimed and accepted. Jesus knew we would doubt and be frightened sometimes about this new identity.

In Luke's reading, Jesus visited his disciples and asked them again, "*Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?*"³⁹ *Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see* (Luke 24: 38-39a). Why are you still unsure of how Jesus sees us? People sometimes need to see the nails and touch them before they can believe, and Jesus knows about that and always presents himself to such people and offers them to stretch out and touch. What nails do we need to personally see and touch before we can say, "I AM A CHILD OF GOD." For the disciples, it took Jesus to connect himself to what is written in the Torah, psalms, and prophecies so that they could get it. We may all have something peculiar that connects us with Jesus, and that experience is peculiar to you, and sometimes it becomes irrelevant to someone but meaningful to you. For the disciples, Luke writes (⁴⁵ *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.*)

He brought change to their lives as they moved from:

1. Fright and alarm to
2. Joy mixed with disbelief and puzzlement to
3. Open and understanding minds and hearts.

That marked shift in the core of their beings led them forth to take great risks, witnessing about the risen Christ. Jesus did not bring them security. Rather, they risk all in following his call. For they had come to understand that Jesus had conquered the ultimate threat, death

itself and their fears were groundless. Jesus' words, "Peace be with you!" came to fruition in their hearts.

The living God, who was and is in Christ, lovingly overcomes ignorance and death so that the world may experience the life that proceeds from the knowledge and experience of God.

We are encouraged to see our identity as God's beloved child and discourages us not to see ourselves otherwise. Instead, we learn to utter the deeper truth: "Not yet complete, but yes, I am! By grace, I am God's own." Yes, I say with faith that I am a child of God.

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