

When it comes to eternal questions like “Who am I” – questions we all ask at some point in our lives – there are a few modern sources of wisdom that come close to getting it right. I ran across one of them doing research for this sermon.

In a 1938 interview about his newest enterprise, Walt Disney had this to say about the first ever full-length animated movie: “Over at our place, we’re sure of just one thing: everybody in the world was once a child. So in planning a new picture, we don’t think of grown-ups, and we don’t think of children, but just of that fine, clean, unspoiled spot deep down in every one of us – that maybe the world has made us forget – and that maybe our pictures can help recall.”<sup>1</sup> While the scripture is true source of wisdom regarding such eternal questions as “Who am I,” that Disney quote comes pretty close.

It’s pretty close to the Apostle John’s first letter where it says, “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.” We are children of God; you are a child of God, first and foremost. Everything else in life flows from that.

Now of course, if we are children of God, that begs the second question “Why am I struggling?” I mean, God is large and in charge and we are his blessed children, so why is life so hard for us? John points to the answer when he says, “The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him,” the world does not know the Risen Lord.

In other words, we live in a world that by-and-large ignores our identity as children of God. We live in a world that treats us as children of circumstance, people left to fend for ourselves, do the best we can with what they have.

And sadly, that’s what we teach our children about the world they’re born into. Listen to what was written by another modern source of wisdom – this time a 20<sup>th</sup> century musician-turned-writer named Pablo Casals. Looking back on life at the ripe old age of 93, Casals wrote the following: “Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that will never be again. And what do we teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France.

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<sup>1</sup> Walt Disney, recorded statement (1938) used in The Pixar Story (2008). Wikiquote.org. [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Walt\\_Disney](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Walt_Disney). Retrieved October 28, 2020.

When will we also teach them what they are? We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you. Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move. You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel? You must work – we must all work – to make the world worthy of its children.”

As the Apostle John says, “The world does not know us” as God’s children. As Pablo Casals says, “You must work ... to make the world worthy of its children,” worthy of God’s children. This is why we struggle in life – we struggle because there’s work to be done. We struggle to bring the world along as we grow into the people God created us to be, or we struggle merely to survive the world as it is. Consider the following example of what it’s like to bring into being the world God envisions, even though we do live in the world as it is.

A family was seated in a restaurant. The server took the order from the adults, then turned to their young son. “What will you have, sonny?” she asked. “I want a hot dog,” the boy said. The mother interrupted. “No hot dog. Give him potatoes, roast beef, and some carrots.” The server ignored her and instead looked at the boy and asked, “Ketchup or mustard?” “Ketchup,” he said, with a happy smile on his face. “Comin’ right up,” said the server, and she headed off for the kitchen. There was stunned silence at the table. After a few moments, the boy turned to his parents and said, “Know what? She thinks I’m real.” Yes, little boy, you are real, a real child of God. And your struggle in life will be to remember that no matter what the world throws your way. We are children of God and we struggle in a world that by-and-large does not know Jesus, does not know us as brothers and sisters in Christ.

This brings us to a third eternal question – “What will I become,” or for those somewhere in the second half of life, “What will become of me, my legacy?” To which John says, “We are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed.”

In a world that wants all the answers, a world that pegs its destination upon the facts at hand, using those facts to chart its course forward, it’s really hard to deal with an unknown destination, one that, as John says, “has not yet been revealed.”

The only way to deal with a destiny like that is to trust in Him who knows the destination, trust in the Risen Lord. Pointing to that unknowable destination that is the fullness of Christ, John turns to us and says, “What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” We cannot know now what we will become in the fullness of time, nor what will become of this world. But we do know that Jesus is bringing us and all the world to himself, transforming the world into the glory of God.

As we look toward that future, we are invited to cultivate a childlike imagination for that kind of world, the kind of life God has made possible for us in Jesus Christ. As children of God, we are to imagine that we can and will become like Jesus.

Now, if you're like me, you're sitting there saying, "Oh sure, Pastor Dave. You're telling me that I can be like Jesus – as wise and as good and faithful as Jesus. I don't think so. Try as I might, I always fall short." To which I say, Yup; that's true. We all fall short. But that's no reason not to try, no reason to give up on being a better person, a better child of God, better brothers and sisters in Christ to one another.

Look at it this way. If we can't imagine having victory over sin – if we can only see ourselves as hopelessly stuck in a never-ending cycle of sin and repentance – then that's a good indication we are not living as the children of God that we are. And where does that leave us? That's another eternal question of the soul – "What do I do now?"

John tells us that everyone who hopes to be more like Jesus Christ strives day by day to go deeper in their faith, seeking to become more like Jesus. Or as John puts it, "All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." We strive to be more like Jesus in all we say and do.

Our scripture reading today ends with a one-sentence reminder that 1) You are a child of God; 2) Your struggle in life is to work toward the world God envisions; 3) Your destiny and the of this world is the fullness of Christ himself; and 4) Your focus today is to be more and more like Jesus. Or as John says, "Little children of God, let no one deceive you (don't let the world fool you.) Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous." Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER:

Giver of all, we are so grateful. You have formed this community of faith and taught us how to love one another.

You have blessed each of us with different gifts so that we may serve and care for each other and our world.

Bind us together, Lord. Help us to offer grace where grace is needed. Help us to always see our Christian brothers and sisters as family, because we are your children.

Let no one in this congregation or the wider family of faith go hungry or in need, but keep us always ready to lend a generous hand.

We pray your healing touch and comforting spirit upon all those we've kept in thought and prayer these recent weeks, even as we thank you, Lord, for coming alongside all those you love as children of the faith.

May the love that we show to each other be a picture of your love to the community around us.

We are one in you, O Lord, you who taught us to pray with one voice, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**