

Acts 3: 12-19
1 John 3: 1-7
April 19, 2015
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church

“See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” There is no exclamation point at the end of this sentence; but there should be!

The older I get, the simpler the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes. The Good News of the Gospel is simply this: In and through Jesus Christ God has restored us to the original relationship we had at the beginning. We are restored to that intimate unconditionally loving relationship which was ours when God made us. We are *children of God*. With few and tragic exceptions, no child has to earn a parent’s love. Flawed as a parent may be, a child takes it for granted that she is beloved. She gives a parent delight *because she is a daughter, because he is a son*. When the children of our family of faith dance in the aisle we experience delight. When their little legs carry them down the aisle holding the brass candle lighters we may hold our breath but we experience joy. We want our children to experience their church family as a safe and loving community. Wherever their lives take them we remain interested in their progress. When they grow to be young adults and remain an active part of the family we are thankful. We rejoice with them when they go to college. And when they return to us as adults it is a miraculous and joyful event.

When children who have been nourished in the faith yet whose lives have taken them far from home seek find in our family of faith a place to raise their children to love and trust Jesus we recognize that we are part of a much larger family of faith. We receive the love and

hope that nourished these adults into the knowledge that they are children of God and we accept the humbling responsibility to continue to communicate this simple yet so profound message.

Yet the truth is, for any of this to happen we must not miss a fundamental fact: no matter what our age may be—whether we have children or not—*we are all children of God*. Our witness of faith begins with our experience that in Christ God has restored us to that precious original relationship. We are restored to that unselfconscious trust in God's unconditional parental love that, in the beautiful and true words of Genesis, "the man and his wife were naked and not afraid."

This is no small accomplishment. I do not believe that all the psychotherapy in the world, all the self-help books and self-esteem seminars can achieve the inner transformation which happens when we truly accept that we are, simply and completely, *children of God*. Indeed we can attend worship services week in and week out, serve on multiple committees and give generous amounts of money *and still never experience the deep and exquisite joy that in Paul's words, "in life and death we belong to God."*

"What is the chief end (purpose) of man?" asks the Shorter Catechism. The answer is this, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to *enjoy him forever*." Glorifying and enjoying God is God's single most important purpose in life. It is the benchmark of our lives. It is the question we will face at the end of our lives. Did we come to experience this life as a gift? Did we glorify God by acknowledging that God is the giver of this gift? Did we give God the giver joy by enjoying the gift? More importantly, in enjoying the gift did we enjoy that love with which

God gave the gift? In other words in living our lives did we see our enjoyment of the gift of life as a way to be in communion with God and so *to enjoy him*?

Let me put this in its most basic form. Is life a *have to* for you; or, is it a *get to*? Children of God *get to* be alive. Children of God have many *have to* days when life is heavy, worrying and sad. But a child of God has an inner resiliency where the tears are wiped away and we *get to* go out and play.

Fellow children, the Bible teaches us that apart from our deep trust that we are children of God, it is difficult to experience joy in life. There are people who are blessed with the gift of enjoying life and do not need this message. I am not one of them. Until Jesus came into my life—that is into my whole life—life was just one big *have to*. As MJ reminds me life was not utter and unrelieved misery. But I could be a pretty gloomy character.

But when Jesus entered my *whole life*, life became a *get to* experience. It began to dawn on me that I was not an undiscovered genius or a wart on the hinder of the universe. I was and am *Stewart*, son of two flawed and wonderful parents and child of a wonderful God. That is enough. Children of God know this.

When Peter tells the gathered to repent so that “times of refreshing” may come, this is what he is talking about. The refreshing comes from the experience of being restored to our original relationship with God in and through Jesus Christ. We repent when, like the prodigal son, we stop trying to make it on the world’s terms and turn toward home to the father who waits to receive us as his children. And yes—we *get to do this. Amen!*