

“Children of Love”
1 John 3:1-3, 16-23
April 25, 2021
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Twyla Joseph is pictured on the front cover of Time magazine. / She is 17 years old and probably would not have been on a magazine cover if it was not for the Covid virus. She is 17 years old and is now notable for probably having to postpone the start of her college career.

The Time magazine article is called” “The Lost Year”

For this teenager that meant losing her senior year in high school.

As she described life in semi-isolation and mostly online she said:

“It’s like no one’s there to check in on us. We only have ourselves”

Now with her savings funds depleted and many classes still online she waits.

In spite of all that she says:

“I actually want to go to college and learn and meet new people and have different experiences and just make memories, if I can do that in a pandemic.”

Certainly most of us can relate to the Time magazine title: “The Lost Year”. / But lately I have been thinking about what that means for teenagers and children. / The most recent surges in case numbers of the Corona-virus are in younger people. / And the scripture reading from 1 John describes followers of Jesus as “Children of God”.

1 John uses the language about being like children as a way to say that we still have some learning and growing to do. / Eventually, John writes, we will see God fully and be LIKE God. But for now as God’s children, we wait and hopefully grow and walk in the light of God as best we can.

But what happens when our opportunities to learn and grow - - are limited?

Maybe there is a way to learn and grow from that too.

Maybe our limitations can become opportunities.

In the case of the Bible reading for today, we are called to learn and grow into people with mature hearts, who love like God loves. / And though that might sound good at first, it is a challenge to live like John describes in this Biblical letter.

It says in 1 John that God's love is made visible in Jesus who laid down his life for us.

To lay down one's life is certainly an ultimate and amazing act of love.

It is something that probably doesn't come easily or naturally.

We grow into that kind of love.

We grow into love that is - that intense.

But according to 1 John - - that is where we are headed - - if we truly want to grow up and abide in God and God's love for us. / John writes: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives..."

The lead-in to this advice is the ancient story of Cain and Abel.

It is originally recorded in Genesis chapter 4, that Cain killed his brother Abel.

Cain did the opposite of 1 John's advice. / Cain killed his brother rather than lay down his life FOR his brother. / Forever after sibling rivalry, and violence have plagued us humans.

Which begs the question - - can we at least try to do otherwise?

And in answer, I would point us to the actions of some other young people. These women are not children anymore, but they were still in their early twenties when the following events occurred in the year 2008.

It was Sara Tucholsky's senior year at Western Oregon University. She was on the softball team, but had never hit a home run. / It was April of 2008 and in a small town in the middle of Washington state there were probably fewer than 100 people in the stands.

It would have been an otherwise - - fairly typical game - - and probably soon forgotten. If not for the following series of events...

It was the top of the second inning in this conference championship game.

With two runners on base Sara hit what could be the game winning hit.

It was out of the park.

It was her first career homerun.

But she failed to touch first base - - and realized it and turned back suddenly. / In doing so she injured her knee and tore her ACL. / She dropped to the ground and crawled back to first base. / When she got back she couldn't walk.

Her coach asked what the rule was in cases like this.

The umpire advised that unless she rounded the bases it would be a 2 run single. The coach could not substitute a runner. / Also the umpire said, none of her teammates could legally touch her.

That was when a player from the other team had an idea. / Mallory Holtman played for the opposing team from Central Washington. / She had hit lots of homeruns. She asked the coach if there was any rule against her and her teammates carrying Sara. / The coach said that opposing team players could touch her if they wanted to.

Mallory and another named Liz Wallace asked her if it was ok if they picked her up and carried her. / "You hit the ball over the fence", Mallory said, "...so you deserve it".

Mallory and Liz carried Sara around the diamond, making sure to touch her foot to each base. / Western Oregon won the game 4-2.

Mallory Holtman had the character to do the right thing at the right time.

And because of it her team lost the game.

It's not exactly laying down you life for another.

But if you love softball it might be a close second.

We can certainly learn from what happened that day.

Life is made up not only of the words we say or speak, but of our deeds.

The letter of John calls that kind of thing, "loving in deed and in truth".

By the way, the Umpire checked it out with the NCAA after the game, and he was wrong.

NCAA rules would have allowed for a substitution in that case.

So someone from her team could legally have run for her in substitution.

But if the Umpire had known that rule, we would not have this story.

The truth of what happened that day was not about the rules, it was about truth.

As Mallory said, "You hit it over the fence, so it IS a homerun".

She knew that was true no matter what the rules said.

And instead of disputing the rules or using it to her advantage, she acted.

In softball, a homerun is a homerun.

Imagine if we could live that way in other areas of life.

What would it mean in family life, or politics, or at your job or school?

What would it mean if we all acted on what we knew was right?

What if we were willing to sacrifice - - or lose our advantage - - if there was anything about how we got there - - that took advantage of another or was unjust or dishonest?

To live that way is what this letter of 1 John seems to recommend.

Throughout this month and into the next we are looking at this amazing letter near the end of the New Testament. / The theme of these weeks is: "What's love got to do with it"?

On April 11, we read about light. / According to the letter, God is both love and light.

Then last week we delved into the challenging topic of love and hate.

So what's love got to do with - - light?

What's love got to do with - - hate?

And today, what's love got to do with - - children?

1 John says that we are children of God - - and like children - - we learn gradually.

1 John also encourages us that as God's children - - we ABIDE in God's love.

It seems to me that the young people I've referred to today help us see what that means.

These teenage and 20 something young people give me hope.

When I read about "little children" in the Bible, these stories help me to see this as affectionate - - rather than demeaning. / Surely we all still have some learning and growing to do. / But at least - - we have to be open to DOING that.

In my experience sometimes so called - - grown up adults - - resist it more.

You can't learn and grow if you think you don't need to.

Maybe the good thing about thinking of ourselves as children is that if we do we will still live in hope of change. / When 1 John encourages us to walk in the LIGHT instead of walking in the dark - - maybe acknowledging our NEED for light is part of it.

Can we open ourselves to God's amazing love and grace?

Can we live - - as children of God?

Which is to say - - children of light.

And children of love.

If we can live that way - - maybe this will not be a "Lost Year" after all.

We have refrained from touching one another for a year.

Only a few limited people have been on the huggable list.

In the softball story, as it played out - - the thing Sara's teammates could not do was to touch her. / And it was in touching her and picking her up - - that the opposing team showed their compassion and respect.

I think that one thing we may have learned is that we don't live well in isolation.

Some of us enjoy solitude more than others, but it's not the same thing.

We have even learned a little about our desire to connect from the zoom online experience. / Several members of Plymouth church have said that we love that on zoom we listen to everyone - - not just chatting with a few friends at coffee hour. / There are ways that the challenges of this past year could actually strengthen our connections to one another.

That is what living for one another is all about - - it seems it seems to me.

We may never be called to lay down our lives for another.

Sometimes soldiers are.

But we CAN all live FOR each other.

And we can do that on zoom OR in person.

That is what this "lost year" has taught me.

And I think it is connected to what 1 John means by abiding in God's love.

Can we open ourselves to God's amazing love and grace?

Can we live - - as children of love?

Which is to say - - as children of God?

I hope so.