

“Where to now, St. John?”

1 John 3:1-7

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Where to now St John?

Last week, we read that the disciples were wondering what to do now. They went fishing. What will we do now that Easter has happened?

We turn to the Epistle of John to see a young church struggle to answer the question of what to do now that Easter is over. In the next 4 weeks, we will turn to the Epistle of John to see how he provides answers to such questions. We begin the preaching series “Where to now, St. John?”

In art class some children were working with polymer clay, a clay-like substance that can be used over and over because it does not harden. A little girl had made a very nice model of a creature with wings. She held it up and said to everyone, "Look at the angel." There were exclamations of delight from the class and teacher. Then the girl quickly molded the angel back into a ball and asked everyone, "Now what is this?" Someone said, "It looks like a ball to me." "No," she said, "It's a hiding angel."

The Bible declares that there is an angel or a saint inside each one of us just yearning to find expression. After all, we were created in God's image. God longs to adopt us as sons and daughters if we are willing. When we allow The Almighty to be Lord of our lives, God molds us like balls of polymer clay until we become extraordinary reflections of Christ.

That's the message of our scriptural lesson for today. It comes from the first letter of John. This letter was not written by John the Apostle but by some later pastor. The letter is a loving and anxious sermon to several churches, probably written around 100 A.D. Pastor John was concerned because these second and third generation Christians were losing some

of their enthusiasm and confidence. They had begun to doubt if they were capable of being Christian disciples in the midst of a world of many religious beliefs.

Pastor John, in our text for today, sends two messages.

**FIRST, REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE.** (Here I attempt to sound like James Earl Jones speaking these words to Simba in the animated movie *The Lion King*.)

Listen again to our text: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

Every person is made in God's image; this means that something of the essence of God is in each person. Every Christian is an adopted child of God.

Listen to scriptural verses declaring this truth:

- "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." (John 1:12) "For all who are led by the spirit of God are sons and daughters of God." (Romans 8:14)
- "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons and daughters of God through faith." (Galatians 3:26)
- "God sent forth his Son to redeem those under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters." (Galatians 4:5)

Think of it this way, suppose that you are a 15-year-old without parents. There is a responsible adult who has always loved and cared for you. She wants to adopt you. But according to the courts, that adoption requires your consent. In a similar sense, God has always loved us and cared for us. Through infant baptism God declares this desire to adopt us. But our permission is required. Once we claim Jesus Christ by faith, our adoption as a son or daughter of God Almighty is official. Then

what a wonderful status we have! What could possibly be a higher honor than to be a child of the King of Kings?

That's the first message from pastor John in our text for today. Remember who you are! (Here again I attempt to sound like James Earl Jones but was told I sound a bit more like Arnold Schwarzenegger.)

**THE SECOND MESSAGE IS THIS: REMEMBER WHAT YOU CAN BECOME.**

Verse two of our text is magnificent. Listen again to it: "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he (that is, Christ) appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

This means that as we live in intimate fellowship with Christ; as we worship, fellowship, and serve with other Christians; as we reach out in service to other people; then we gradually and increasingly resemble our Lord. His spirit, his power, his wisdom seep into us. Therefore, we become capable of extraordinary deeds through him.

Remember what you can become.

Dr. Bob Stamps is a seminary professor who happens to be bald. One night he and his wife went out for dinner. They left their two small children with a babysitter. The babysitter got interested in a TV program and did not supervise the children very well. When the parents returned, they found that their little son, Peter Andrew, had found his father's electric shaver and had shaved a big strip right down the middle of his head. He said, "Peter Andrew, I have told you not to play with my shaver. Now you are going to receive a spanking you will remember." Peter Andrew said, "Wait until you see my sister!" They ran into their four-year-old daughter's room and there she was with all her hair shaved off. Now Bob was really furious. Just as he raised his hand to begin the spanking, Peter Andrew looked at him with tears in his eyes and said,

"Dad, we were just trying to look like you." There was no spanking that night. Instead, they both got an explanation and a hug.

But you might be thinking: There is not much chance I will resemble Jesus any time soon. I'm too selfish or too short-tempered or too lustful or too resentful.

But remember, Jesus has a long and proud history of taking ordinary people and helping them become extraordinary. He took an intolerant bigot named Paul and made him the ambassador of a universal gospel. He took a wishy-washy fisherman named Simon Peter and made him the founder of his church. He took a despised tax collector named Matthew and made him the writer of the First Gospel.

A little closer to our time, consider two South Carolinians who, though seemingly ordinary, became extraordinary for their Lord.

Mary McLeod Bethune was born in the tiny town of Mayesville in 1875, the youngest of seventeen children born to freed slaves. At the age of nine she could neither read nor write. But at the age of eleven she went to a Christian school. Afterward, she attended the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Then she went to Daytona Beach, Florida. Her total wealth was \$1.50, but she was determined to start a school for black girls. Mary Bethune raised money by selling pies to tourists. The school she founded became Bethune-Cookman College. She served as its first president. Later she helped President Franklin D. Roosevelt start the National Youth Administration which provided employment for youth. Who would have ever guessed what that little illiterate black girl could become through Jesus Christ her Lord?

Or, consider Agatha Burgess who lived in Buffalo, South Carolina. Though 80 years old, she would get up every morning at 5:00 AM to cook preparing the food each day which the Meals on Wheels volunteers took to home-bound persons. In addition, she would feed anyone else who would come to her door charging \$2.75 per meal which almost allows her to break even. Many people would ask Agatha why at her 80

years young age doesn't she just sit down and rest. She replied, "I want to be a person who lives by the side of the road and is a friend to everyone. I can serve my Lord by helping other people. I'm going to rest in heaven."

Remember, what you can become. There is an angel within each of us just yearning to burst forth. Stay close to Christ, that angel will begin to show. We will begin to resemble our Lord and will become extraordinary persons.

Ask this question: When we consider the gifts and opportunities the Lord has given us, what does Jesus want us to attempt in Christ's name?

One day a writer traveled to an isolated monastery to interview a holy man who was reputed to be a genius. The writer asked him, "What is it about a person that qualifies him to be called a genius?" The holy man answered, "The ability to recognize." "The ability to recognize what?" asked the writer. "The ability to recognize the butterfly in a caterpillar; the eagle in an egg; and the saint in a selfish human being."

None of us knows what's ahead of us. But it is absolutely vital that in the midst of whatever comes we remember who we are and what we can become. We are God's adopted sons and daughters. With Christ living within us, we are designed to be extraordinary. There is an angel or saint within us just yearning to burst forth! May it be for us all an unforgettable journey with the living Christ!