

## **We Purify in Hope** **1 John 3:1-7**

### **You Might Be A United Methodist if you know these terms...**

Last Sunday I shared some Methodist jokes and people liked them. Let me share a few more today since we are still in Eastertide, a time of joy and laughter. You might be a United Methodist if when the pastor hits the 61 minute mark the congregation begins to look at their watches and cough. You might be a United Methodist if you think someone who says “amen” while the pastor is preaching might be a charismatic. You might be a United Methodist if you think God’s presence is strongest in the back 3 pews. You might be a United Methodist if you have never sung the third verse of any hymn. I think we laugh because these jokes capture and reflect some characteristics of United Methodists. I hope that we can continue to walk joyfully on our faith journey of transformation in this Eastertide and beyond.

### **We are all Children of God! Aren’t We?**

Today’s reading begins with an important claim. “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are... Beloved, we are God's children now.” (vs. 1-2) We are all children of God. Can I get an Amen? We all say ‘Amen!’ We have no problem with saying ‘amen’ to this wonderful message. What was distinctive of Jesus was that he authentically knew and understood that he was God’s beloved son. When Jesus received baptism, he heard a voice from heaven saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17) Jesus fully lived out his identity and reminded all people that they too are God’s children. Being children of God means that you will live a particular way, the way of love. So, Jesus loved people indiscriminately and became a friend to sinners, tax collectors, morally questionable people and those who were despised by society. He taught his disciples to love their neighbors and even their enemies. On the cross, he prayed for those who mocked and persecuted him and thus, showed what it means to be a child of God. Just as Jesus saw himself and others as God’s children, so we too must see ourselves and others as God’s children.

Of course, treating ourselves and others as God’s children is harder than it may sound. According to research, approximately 85 percent of the population suffers from low self-esteem.<sup>1</sup> I was shocked by this high number. In our competitive society, people often struggle with the emotion of being ‘not good enough.’ In schools or workplaces, our value has often been determined by our performance. There is only one first place, so we were often pushed into an inevitable competition to be the best to prove superiority over others. When we fail to meet the expectations of society or even the church, people are haunted by the feelings of inadequacy, shame and guilt. So, many times, we don’t love ourselves as God loves us.

Furthermore, people of color often struggle to develop a positive self-image because lighter skin is still favored over darker skin in our society. Those with darker skin experience more discrimination than those with lighter skin. In many ways, skin color still impacts and shapes the daily lives of people of color in America.<sup>2</sup> Loving ourselves as God loves us is harder than we can imagine. Of course, it goes without saying that treating others as God’s children is even harder than treating ourselves as God’s children

### **Purity**

But John constantly reminds us that we are God’s children. How have we become God’s children? We have become God’s children because God first loves us and calls us God’s children. This loving relationship between us and the Father does not depend on our merit or validation from the world. Because it was given by God, nothing can take it away from us. We are God’s children, no matter what. Amen? You have a charismatic preacher today!

John said, “And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (vs. 3) Those who accept God’s love and live lives as God’s children purify themselves. When we hear the word “purity,” we may

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sustainable-life-satisfaction/201906/the-relationship-yourself>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2021/11/04/majority-of-latinos-say-skin-color-impacts-opportunity-in-america-and-shapes-daily-life/>

think of promise rings or chastity or personal holiness. But In the Old Testament, the process of purification basically means to rid people and their immediate environment of pollution.<sup>3</sup> Imagine that you discover that your house has a serious mold issue and unfortunately it has spread throughout your entire house. You feel unclean since you slept in a bedroom with mold. What would you do? You would like to take a shower for personal hygiene as well as to remove the mold. If you don't remove the mold, it doesn't matter how often you take a shower, you will be impacted by the unsanitary environment. Similarly, purity is about both individual and societal impacts of sin and how to rid ourselves and society of sin. Figuratively speaking, sin deceives us into believing and acting as if we are not children of God. We need to purify ourselves and society from systemic, institutional and ideological evils in our midst such racism, sexism, heterosexism, agism, discrimination, inequity and all things that hinder us from seeing ourselves and others as God's children.

John Wesley said that the phrase, "Holy Solitaries" is no more consistent with the gospel than Holy Adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love, is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection." There's no holiness but social holiness. For purity, we need to work on both personal and social holiness.

How can we purify ourselves from sin that deceives us into believing that we are not God's children? First, trust God and God's steadfast love. John Wesley said that we are saved by faith in God and through this faith we are saved from the power of sin. God loves us not only at our best, but also at our worst and calls us to be God's children. If you cannot trust yourself, trust God's love and believe that you are God's children. That enables us to purify ourselves and change our lives.

A few years ago, I heard a sermon by a Korean pastor. He had been a troublemaker in school. He and his friends were often involved in fights, and, of course, his mother was frequently called to come to the school. After causing another big problem, his mother was summoned to the school. At the meeting, his teacher kept telling her about his problems and how bad he was. On their way home, she walked silently, and he followed her. He expected a scolding from his mother, but after a long silence, she turned to her son and told him that "Your teacher was very odd today. He kept telling me how bad you are, but I know who you are." He confessed that he could change his life and became a pastor because of her steadfast love for him. God loves us no matter what and we are God's beloved children no matter what. Don't let anyone take this precious gift away from you.

Say 'no' to all systemic, institutional and ideological obscenities in our society. If some say that you are not worthy because of your skin color, age, sexual orientation or low bank account balance, simply say "but God still loves me." If you make mistakes or fall and feelings of guilt creep in saying that you are not good enough to be God's child, simply say "but God still loves me." If you happen to see or hear someone say, "they are not worthy and are poisoning the blood of the country because they are Muslim or immigrants," simply say, but God loves them too. By choosing to love ourselves and others as God's children, we abide in Jesus and "No one who abides in him sins."

If you feel that you are still sinful in many ways and not perfect in love, that's o.k. Christian perfection, in the Wesleyan sense, is not about being mistake-free or spotless. Rather Christian perfection is a process. It's about allowing the love of God to shape our lives and guide our actions. When we cease loving, we are no longer following Christ. But if we continue to trust God's love and choose to love ourselves and others as God's children, we abide in Christ. Choose to love other as God loves us. Purify ourselves and our society in hope. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, D. M. (1991). *First, Second, and Third John* (p. 78). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.