

“What We Will Be”

**Pastor Dave Carlson
First Presbyterian Church
Sunday, April 22, 2012**

First Lesson: Revelation 21:1-7

Second Lesson: 1 John 3:1-7

Actress Jeannette Clift George tells the story of a woman and her baby, flying home on a very turbulent flight. Every time the baby cried, the young mother fed the baby a little fruit and a little orange juice, but because the flight was so bumpy, everything that went down came back up. By the end of the flight, the carpet was a mess, and the baby looked awful. At the gate was a young man who had to be Daddy: flowers in hand and wearing white pants and a white shirt. Jeanette George thought to herself, “He’s going to run to that baby, get one look, and keep running!” Of course, he didn’t. He grabbed the messy baby, held her against his white shirt and whispered loving things in her ear. He never stopped hugging and kissing that baby, all the way to luggage claim, stroking her hair, welcoming her back home. Seeing this, Jeanette George asked herself, “Where did I ever get the idea that my Father God is less loving than a young daddy in white slacks and white shirt?”

First John tells us that God loves us so much that we are “called children of God,” and what’s more, says John, “that is what we are.” When we baptized Sophia Whiting and Benton Chaloux as children of God, we celebrated and recognized their true identity as God’s beloved, and all the promise and hope which that carries with it into the future. While baptism embraces our biological connection as parents, children and siblings, as grandparents and great-grandparents, even more so, it extends this family connection throughout the church universal. In baptism, we as members of the church, affirm our connection to Sophia and to Benton and to each other. And we promise to help each other discover together who we are as children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ. Sometimes that involves guidance, sometimes wise counsel, and all the time love and hope and faith – all those things that make parents great. But in the end and despite our best intentions, who Sophia and Benton or anyone else will ultimately become in life is unknowable with any certainty. We hope and pray that our loved ones will grow up to become good people. We hope and pray that they will be able to enjoy all that life has to offer. But we can’t guarantee it. And that’s why we baptize babies. We baptize babies to actively and publicly place their future in God’s hands. Because, with God, we do have a guarantee, if we’re faithful to God’s promises and follow God’s leading in our lives. Because with God, we come to know and experience and share a love and a hope and a faith more powerful than any earthly limitations. That’s the focus of today’s sermon-how we come to experience such a divine sense of love, hope and faith, and what this means for us and for the world. We know this type of love when we are called to care for a loved one beyond what’s reasonable as many of you have done, giving up your life that another may live. In this type of love, we are experiencing divine love. Divine love is the type of love we read about in First John, when it says, speaking to you – to us – “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when (Christ) is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” You see, divine love is transformational. And in sharing, such love with one another, we live into our hope as Christians, as children of God. Our hope as Christians is not like any other type of hope. It’s different. It’s different than, say, the type of hope we’re talk about when we says, “I hope the Royals beat the Toronto Blue Jays today;” though I

think you have good reason to hope for a win given past matchups of these two teams. But still, the hope we have for those whom God has claimed as beloved children – us included, you included – the hope we have for ourselves and for our loved ones and for all creation is a different sort of hope. It's a hope based in the certainty of our faith. The royals may not win today but our sense of hope and our faith goes on. And in baptism, that hope and that faith grow more and more – but only in direct proportion to how faithful we are as children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here's another story about a daddy – a parent – who reflects a hope and faith that carries him beyond his wit's end. The guy is pushing a shopping cart through a store. And in the cart is a screaming, bouncing baby boy. As the man walks up and down the aisles, he keeps saying over and over, "Don't yell, Bobby. Calm down, Bobby. Don't get excited, Bobby." A woman standing next to him notices what's going on and says, "You certainly are to be commended for trying to soothe your son Bobby." The man looks at her and says, "Lady, I'm Bobby!"

Now that's someone who's relying on a faith and hope that can carry us forward when we've reached our limits – no more patients, no more strength, and no earthly reason anyone would go on. Our Christian hope – which has been fulfilled and achieved and made certain in the resurrected Christ – our Christian hope gives us the ability to get through anything – and certainly through another Royals loss if that were to happen. Because in the end, while our Christian hope may not be able to affect the outcome of a ballgame, it does have the power to transform the world around us. Did you know that? That you had access to a hope so powerful as to transform the world you live in? Many see the world as hopeless, heading in the wrong direction, aimlessly off course. But those who live in the faith and hope of Jesus Christ know better. First John says, "The world does not know us (because) it did not know (Jesus Christ)." In other words, that part of the world which lives in hopelessness exists apart from Christ. And as troubling as it may be that so much of the world seems hopeless, we who live in Christ know better than to let even that get us down. Because we see past the world's limitations and into the faith and hope and possibility that Christ brings to our hearts and our minds and our families and our friends. As Christians, while others are reaching dead ends, we are living into hope. We dare to live differently from those who have no hope. We live in Jesus Christ. We live as children of God. To live as children of God is to draw ever closer to God, realizing that God is there waiting for us, just like that daddy dressed in white waiting for his little baby. God loves us so much that not even an orange sticky mess can get in between us and God. But, we do have to live into this divine sense of love and hope and faith, we have to grow into our identity as children of God. Here comes the take-home message for today. As infants, we're not responsible for the sticky messes we get ourselves into. We don't have the choice to be a little cleaner or neater when it comes to drawing closer to God. We rely on our families – both biological and spiritual – to keep us clean and safe and on the right track. But as we grow older, we take on the responsibility of caring for ourselves, of keeping ourselves out of messes and away from things that get in between us and God. First John refers to this when it says, "All who have this hope (this certainty of faith in Jesus Christ) all who have this hope purify themselves, just as he is pure." We purify ourselves as Christians – we keep ourselves spiritually, mentally and even physically fit as Christians – by living under a different set of rules than those that governed us before we laid claim to our baptismal identity as children of God. When we experience, recognize, and embrace the extravagant, unbounded love that God has for us, we are drawn to respond by living life differently from that moment on. And we can claim and reclaim our identity as children of God in any moment of our lives.

And when we do so, we gain the power and strength to live life differently, to love our neighbors as ourselves (as God loves us). We become able to hear God's voice over and above our own. We make ourselves subject to God's will and, in Christ, to the care of one another. We practice kindness and charity. We bear each other's burdens. We forgive rather than hold a grudge. And in doing these things – in being this type of a person – we are transforming the world. We are participating in what God is doing to usher in a new heaven and a new earth. This is “what we will be” – a new and unimaginable creation in which Christ is revealed to us, through us and throughout the world.

Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, you are God alone. Creator of the universe and all that is in it, you have blessed us with everything we need. You have given us a gift of grace we don't deserve. Our hearts filled with joy! What a gift it is to be able to called children of God. To call you Father means that you are the source of our love for one another, as parents and children and grands and great-grands and aunts and uncles and brothers and sisters. We love because you first loved us. Teach us how to live as children of light, as children of you, O God. Help us not to run to others or try to fix our lives on our own. Let us always come to you first. You know us better than we know ourselves. Increase our faith and let us become like little children – always knowing that our Father in heaven knows best. Thank you for calling us your own, for teachings us your ways, for putting in our hearts a sense of love and devotion, of forgiveness and strength that comes not from us, but from you. In prayer, we are reminded of just how much you give to us, just how much we owe to you, and just how much we mean to one another, as we lift up in prayer, the words you taught us, saying:

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.