

December 20, 2017 – Isaiah 43:1-7 & John 1:10-13

Everybody wants to believe that they are a child of “god.” And I mean everybody. Every religion, in some way, is centered around the idea of being connected to their god in a relationship as close as a parent and child. No matter who or what that “god” is.

That's because our god is our source of hope. Luther said that a god is that from which you expect all good. It is the thing which you fear, love, and trust above all other things. We all want to believe that there is more to this life than a few meager years that we live on this earth. And being a child of our god gives us that hope.

So if you're a Hindu, you're a child of god through reincarnation. If you're a modern spiritualist, you're a child of god through the collective consciousness of Mother Earth. Even if you're an atheist, you still have the confidence that you are a child of evolution, and will be remembered for your contributions to humanity.

We all want to believe that we are children of god. And it's always been that way. Even in Jesus' day. Because the Jew believed that they too were children of God.

And they had good reason for it. They were children of Abraham, after all. They could trace a direct, genetic lineage all the way to the first Patriarch. They had, flowing in their veins, the blood of the man to whom God had made a covenant of protection and blessing.

And, because of that, they were confident God would always be with them. Would always rescue them. Would always bless them with success. It was just a matter of time before they would be on top again. All they needed was to be good, obedient children, and God would make them into a glorious kingdom.

They weren't terribly far off. Because Israel was, indeed, God's people. Isaiah, in our Old Testament lesson talks about how God called them by name. Redeemed them. Brought them through fire and water. They were his sons and daughters. They were his children. Children of God.

But in our Gospel lesson, things have changed. God hasn't changed. But his people have. Because they don't recognize him.

*“He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”*

You see, as John previously explained, Jesus is the Word. The Word made flesh. Which means that when you reject Jesus, you reject God's Word. And when you reject God's Word, you reject Jesus. The two can't be separated.

The Jews claimed to put all of their hope in God's Word. In the covenant that God had made with Abraham that had been passed down in scripture for generations. They believed they were children of God because God's Word said they were children of God.

But then they rejected Jesus. They didn't know him when he arrived. They didn't receive him when he spoke. They thought they knew God's Word. But then when God's Word was standing right in front of them, they wanted him dead.

No, in the end, they were just as much in the dark as the rest of the world. And so they rejected the true Word and hung him on a cross. The people who insisted that they were sons and daughters of God rejected the only begotten Son of God. Which meant that they couldn't possibly be children of God themselves.

Why did this happen? How did God's people go from being precious in his eyes, honored and beloved? To being completely outside of his grace and mercy?

Well, John explains that too. Because there were those who did receive Jesus. Who received the Word. Believed the Word. And became children of God. Who were they?

John says, *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”* The key phrase there: he gave them the right.

For the Jews, being a child of God is something that happened to you for one simple reason: you earned it. You earned it by your genetics, as a descendent of Abraham. You earned it through circumcision. You earn it by keeping kosher and sabbath and all the other works of the Law. You earned your status as a child of God.

In fact, that's how pretty much all religions handle things. By earning your place as a child of God. You earn a better reincarnation. You earn your connection to Mother Earth. You earn a place in history. Everyday, billions of people wake up and secretly ask themselves, “Have I earned my place as a child of God?”

And, unfortunately, there are a lot of people who call themselves Christians among those billions. Because, from the earliest days of the church, there have been those who were convinced that God's grace wasn't actually grace. That it was a reward earned through keeping the Law.

And throughout the centuries, that really hasn't changed. Human beings like thinking that we can earn our place as God's children. Even if we, like the Jews did, reject God's Word and God's only begotten Son.

But, according to John, there's nothing about being a child of God that's earned. It is a right, a privilege, a status, that is given to you. As a gift. There's nothing earned about it.

Because we are born of God. Show of hands, who here chose your parents? Anyone? Anyone choose the day you were born? Was anyone here interviewed before you were born to ensure that giving birth to you was worth the effort?

It's ridiculous to say those kinds of things. But John makes it clear, to say that you are a child of God is to say that he gave birth to you. That you were born of God.

Now, of course, being born of God is not like your human birth. You were not born of blood – in which the blood of your father and mother were joined together to make you. You were not born of the will of the flesh – in which your father and mother sexually desired each other and you were the result. You were not born of the will of man – in which your parents just really wanted a kid.

No, you weren't born of God in the same way that you were born of your parents. But you were born. Born of water and the Spirit, as Jesus will explain later in John's gospel. Born of the Spirit into a new spirit. Born into a life that cannot die.

You were born of God by baptism. And it was very much the same way that Jesus himself was born. Because, like us, Jesus was not born of blood or the flesh or the will of man. Like us, he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Like us, he was born without sin. To live a life that death could not destroy, because he was raised to new life.

That is your life too. That is what it means to be a child of God. Because you are indeed all of those wonderful things that Isaiah described. You are formed by God. Redeemed by him. Precious in his eyes. Honored. Beloved.

He is your Lord, God, and Savior who gathers up his people from east and west, north and south, from the ends of the earth. You believe in his name and receive him in the Lord's Supper because in Baptism he called you by name. You are his. You belong to him.

Not because you've earned it. But because his Word was made flesh. And even though you didn't know him, he knew you. And gave you as a gift the right to be called a child of God. He gave you as a gift something more to this life than the few meager years that we live on this earth. He gave you as a gift the hope of eternal life with him. Amen.