

✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

Why is it that so many people like the idea of weddings and family reunions and parents and children and togetherness? It has to do with love and hope. We know what love feels like—or what it should feel like. If you're from a family that rarely hugs, you still know what love feels like. You bond by doing things together and talking nice. After a rare fracas, you wake up the next morning and you don't talk about the fracas, you put it behind you, you act like it never happened. And that's how your family knows they're over it. You know what love feels like in your family. | If you're from a touchy-feely family, love feels like a hug, a close-your-eyes, grin-on-your-face, squeeze-out-a-little-grunt kind of hug. Either way togetherness has to do with love and hope. We hope that the people closest to us will accept us in love and accept our love.

When a family member has been rotten to us, we want them to apologize, perhaps a little for the sake of justice, but more so because we want to reconcile and be together. This is actually better than acting like it never happened. When we have wronged someone in our family, we humble ourselves and apologize. When

someone has apologized, we say, "I forgive you." We don't want any wedges between anyone in our family.

Where did we learn to do family like this? From God himself. The apostle John says in his first epistle: *¹How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!* Perhaps you noticed that John doesn't spend a lot of time here trying to persuade us that we are sinners. In fact if you read the whole letter, you get the impression that John assumes we know how bad our sins are when it comes to having a relationship with God. That's why the Father's love for us is so astounding to John. **WHAT A WONDERFUL LOVE!**

Do you see the connection between this text and Reformation Sunday? On Reformation Sunday we thank God for revealing his Word to the church, and then for restoring his Word to the church whenever his Word has been lost, and then for preserving his Word in the church down through history so that we have it today. It is through this very Word, and this Word alone [*sola Scriptura*], that our gracious God called us to be his children, brought us to faith in Jesus, and keeps us in his family of believers. **WHAT A WONDERFUL LOVE!** The

Reformation connection is even easier to see when we hear the two verses that come before our text. ^{2:28}*And now, dear children, continue in [Christ], so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. ²⁹If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.*

This text helps us with our Welcome Home services. This Welcome Home series wants us remember that **love takes time**. Whenever we think of ourselves as children of God, then we have the proper motivation to manage well the limited time we have in this life. Earthly life is limited. An eighty-year life span may seem like a long time to a ten year old. But to a sixty-year-old, it can feel like life is 75% over. Love takes time. Eighty years is not a long time to give and receive love. But because our heavenly Father loves us with such a wonderful love, we want to spend significant time loving others.

In fact wouldn't it be awesome to draw the whole world into a loving relationship? Since our heavenly Father wants the whole world to know about the love he has lavished on them by the blood of Jesus, it's natural for followers of Jesus to want to share the good news of God's love with

everyone. Sometimes when people hear the gospel, the Holy Spirit brings them to faith in Jesus, and they become part of God's family. They join us in saying, WHAT A WONDERFUL LOVE!

But many people don't appreciate the message. They don't get it. So they don't get God. And they don't get us either. To them we can seem like a threat to the way of life they cling to, even when their way of life feels dark to them. John talks about this with these words: ¹*The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.* People who don't know the true God by faith in Jesus still sense a need for some kind of "god." So they grasp at ideas that are associated with "god" such as being spiritual, participating in religious rites, forming human ideas about who Jesus is and what he tried to accomplish. Even atheism is a way of grasping at "god" because it makes humans the highest authority, giving us God's place.

Although unbelievers have no personal acquaintance with the true Father, they can be personally introduced to him by those who are personally acquainted with him. In my prayers for you, I ask God to help you think about where others will spend eternity. Everyone is going to spend eternity somewhere.

When our concern for others grows, it can lead us to reach out in love. We know WHAT A WONDERFUL LOVE our Father has! He wants everyone to be saved through a knowledge of the truth about him. He wants to bring his truths to others through us so that everyone can be as blessed as we are.

John continues: ²*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known*, well at least the full extent of what we will be has not yet been made known. We know, for instance, there will be white robes for us, but we aren't wearing them today. Yet already now God always sees us clothed in the white robe of Christ's righteousness. He thinks of us as having kept the Ten Commandments perfectly, and he loves us for it. We know there will be crowns of glory for us in heaven, but a crown does not shine on our brow today. Yet the Psalmist (103) reminds us that we are already crowned with God's compassion. WHAT A WONDERFUL LOVE! We're like a diamond that has just been dug out of a mine. We're valuable to God already. But just wait until all our facets are beautifully cut and polished! Then when God shines through us, we will reflect brilliant flashes of his glory. This is why we are willing to continue wrestling with our sinful flesh and

resisting the urgings of the sinful world, even as we edge closer to the inevitable end of our mortality.

John writes: ²*We know that when [Christ] appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* We shall be like him. Adam and Eve used to be like him. But they decided God was holding out on them, that they weren't really like him. They wanted to "be like God." And, bitter irony, their attempt to become like him resulted in the loss of being like him. Now every child is born in the image of Adam, inheriting the sinful flesh from their sinful parents. But WHAT A WONDERFUL LOVE the Father lavishes on us. When he brings us to faith in Jesus, he begins to put his image back into us. We call it the new self. It is very much like God in true righteousness and holiness. We believers can do things God actually considers good because God has begun to restore his image in us. Just think how good things will be in the next life when God's image is fully restored and the sinful flesh is fully extracted from us! Hoping for that existence keeps us striving for it and sharing Jesus with others. Yes, sometimes we stammer when we try to talk about Jesus. But we still bring him up in conversations. Sometimes our lives of love are tainted with selfishness, but we keep coming

back to love. We keep confessing our sins and being forgiven by God. We keep curbing the gross sins from our life that displease God. We keep trying to create opportunities to lay God's Word on the hearts of people.

This is natural because children aspire to be like their father. We believers want to please our "Dad." And why shouldn't we? Our heavenly Father provides for us to such degree that he has won our hearts. We yearn for the entire world to join us in praising God for his amazing grace. We want to lead lives that make our Father proud. And we would dearly love it if those who currently hate us would someday soon want to know our Father who taught us to love.

Yet we must be content to appear weak to a dead world, unrecognizable as anything special. John tells us this will always be the case. That's why we try to spend time with our Father. In his Word he takes our hand and walks with us. **WHAT A WONDERFUL LOVE!** Our Father won't abandon us. And he won't neglect the rest of this world as long as the sun rises and sets.

Children often seem similar to their parents. How many times have we said about a child, "She looks just like

her mother," or "He acts just like his father." Children mimic their parents in earthly ways. Even the way a son walks can lead people to recognize him as his father's child. But what if a child loses a loving parent through death or divorce? We can pray for such children. You see, God has a way of supplying people to help fill the gap of the missing parent, to serve as a good role model to imitate.

Children mimic their earthly parents also in spiritual ways. Children whose parents live their faith at home tend to grow up into that same faith. No wonder our pastor urges us to spend time getting to know our God at home. Love takes time. When we spend time meditating on God's Word, we get better acquainted with our heavenly Father. We get to ponder his power, his justice, his forgiveness, his unrelenting grace, his love for even those who hate him. Meditating on God's Word and regularly receiving the Sacrament is how the Holy Spirit equips us with the wonderful traits of our loving heavenly Father.

Love takes time. God took the time to show his love to us. **WHAT A WONDERFUL LOVE!** Let's keep taking the time to love our heavenly Father.