



Lexington Presbyterian Church

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The Body

1 Cor. 11:23-26 & 1 Jn. 3:1-3

A sermon by William M. Klein

15 April 2018

1 See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.
2 Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.
3 And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 Jn. 3:1-3 NRSV)

23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. (1 Cor. 11:23-29 NRSV)

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When you hear the term "the kingdom of God," I suspect what comes to mind is an idea...a notion...an impression...maybe a hope. I suspect you think of "the kingdom of God" as something that exists beyond this life...something you talk about (if you talk about it) in future not present tense. I suspect that for most folks "the kingdom of God" is a term that better describes a reality in heaven than on earth. Am I right?

That was not the case for Jesus. For Jesus the kingdom of God was not an ethereal, immaterial idea. It was a visible, palpable, contemporaneous, bodily reality.¹ Emily Dickinson once said, "'Hope' is the thing with feathers."² I don't know if she meant it this way, but I hear her saying hope is a visible, palpable, bodily reality...or it is nothing at all.

Can't the same be said of the kingdom of God? It is not a disembodied idea. It is not a reality we are invited to look forward to someday in the "by-and-by."

The psalmist invited the people to "taste and see that the Lord is good"³...to directly experience God's goodness through their fingers, taste buds, eyes, and ears. In his letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul invited them to do what Jesus had told the disciples to do...which is, to take and eat and drink what came to be known as the Lord's Supper. Paul understood what Jesus understood...that God's kingdom is a physical, touchable reality. The psalmist and Paul were saying God's goodness is a thing with feathers...here, now, today, tomorrow, and forever.

Were they right? In your experience, in what sense is God's kingdom tangible? How does the present reality of God's kingdom claim you, effect you, shape you, empower you? In what sense is God's kingdom a visible, palpable, bodily reality?

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More than you may think. You and I get a glimpse or a taste of God's kingdom when, as the psalmist put it, "brothers and sisters dwell in unity."⁴ You and I get a glimpse or a taste of God's kingdom when we witness the liberating power of forgiveness. We get a glimpse or taste of God's kingdom when we see sacrificial love in action: a parent putting his or her wants on hold in order to be 100% present to a child...a white man willing to confront his buddies for telling racist jokes.

We get a glimpse or a taste of God's kingdom when a season of overwhelming anxiety is overshadowed by a fresh and unexpected peacefulness. We get a glimpse or taste of God's kingdom when it dawns on us that God's Spirit is at work helping us see that faithfulness does not place upon us the burden of being right...but rather the freedom to realize Christ is right and Christ makes us right. We get a glimpse or taste of God's kingdom when we set aside differences and make our way as one people to the Lord's Table to share the bread of heaven and the cup of new life.

The scriptures steadily and unrelentingly invite us to reflect on our bodies...on the bodily, material reality of our lives...on the body politic, on the body of Christ, and on the church as the body of Christ. We bodily participate in the life of Christ as a way to glorify God.⁵

In the passage from 1 John, we read these words: "See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." In other words, being children of God is not something we will become some day in the future. We are, in this very moment, God's children. God so loved us that in and through his Son we are God's children now.

The writer of 1 John goes on to suggest that as wonderful as it is for us to **be** children of God, when it sinks into our heads and hearts just how fantastic this is then we want more. We want more of Jesus. We want to be more like him. We do not want to settle for being less than the people we can be if and when we follow Jesus.

The insightful Roman Catholic theologian of the last century, Karl Rahner, said this. He said, "We are Christian in order to become Christian." Rahner's insight bowled me over when I first read it...and it continues to sound a compelling ring of truth for me.

We are children of God...in order to become children of God. As the writer of 1 John put it, "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."

In other words, children of God have work to do. And what is that work? I want you to think about that question. But before we try to address that question, I want us to understand that becoming more like Christ is not a solo sport. We don't simply need the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit. We need one another. We need the church.

I think that on some level you can all say, "Yes, I need the church." In practice, though, it seems that more Christians than you may realize think faithfulness is a solo sport. They think faithfulness is something each person must (or even can) do on his or her own...by his or her strength of character, grit, and determination.

Such a perspective may resonate with the myth of the American dream. But you have to ignore so much of scripture in order to say the idea of picking one's self by one's own bootstraps is a Christian perspective.

You and I are children of God together. Certainly each one of us is a child of God... but we only learn what it means to be children of God together...as we attend to the body, the church.

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Now...let's give some thought to the work we have to do as children of God. What is that work and what does that work look like? Let me list just five things that immediately come to my mind.

1) **Scripture.** Making a regular habit of studying the scriptures of our faith - the Old and New Testaments. God asked Ezekiel and John of Patmos to "eat" the scriptures.⁶ God did not mean for Ezekiel or John to literally eat the scrolls. God meant for them to devour the scriptures...to feast upon them so often that they ingested the content and its message ran through their spiritual bloodstream. Making a regular habit of studying the scriptures of our faith is one way we learn more and more the broadest implications of what it means to be children of God.

2) **Great Commandment.** When Jesus was asked to summarize the commandments, remember what he said? Love God and neighbor.⁷ That summary of the commandments guided Jesus every day. If we allow God's Spirit to help us focus upon loving God and our neighbor we learn more and more the depth of what it means to be children of God.

3) **Humility and modesty.** We learn more about what it means to be children of God if and when we realize faithfulness invites us to consider not just our own wants, our own desires, our own bodies...but to consider our neighbors' bodies in ways that take into consideration socioeconomic, political issues...in ways that assure bodily well-being for all.⁸

On the outside chance that sounds a little airy-fairy, let me be more specific. Drawing upon the conversations we have been having in preparation for the *Festival of Faith* this coming weekend, we have been invited to realize the existence and pervasiveness of institutional racism and our conscious and unconscious role in perpetuating racism. I am convinced we learn more about what it means to be children of God if and when we have the character and the courage to expose our long-held beliefs to the examining table...and to ask God to cleanse us of the ways in which those beliefs and behaviors have actually kept us from being more like Jesus.

4) **Stewardship.** We learn what it means to see Christ more clearly and therefore more and more to be children of God as we cherish his planet, tend and care for it, and love it...as we see creation just as God saw and sees it...as **good**. More and more we become children of God as we do our best to challenge policies and practices that do not cherish the good creation.

5) **The Lord's Table.** I believe, as I said earlier, that by coming to the Lord's Table we learn something about what it means to be children of God. Jesus invites us to come to this table...to be made one with God and one another at this table. If we rise from our seats and come to the table with Jesus' invitation in mind, then we can set aside differences

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and make our way as one people to share the bread of heaven and the cup of new life. And we can return to our seats resolved to let this meal fashion us more and more into children of God.

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You have probably thought of other thing you could add to this brief list. And I encourage you to take time to consider the ways in which faithfulness is not just an idea. Take time to consider the ways in which the kingdom of God is a thing with feathers...a visible, palpable, bodily reality...here, now, today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen and amen.



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Endnotes:

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- ¹ Brueggemann, Walter. 2017. *Gift and Task*. Louisville: WJK Press, 98.
 - ² See the first line of Emily Dickinson's poem, "*Hope*" is the thing with feathers.
 - ³ See Psalm 34:8.
 - ⁴ See Psalm 133:1.
 - ⁵ Brueggemann, 98.
 - ⁶ See Ezekiel 3:3 and Revelation 10:8-10.
 - ⁷ See Mark 12:28-34.
 - ⁸ Brueggemann, 98.