

Children of God  
1 John 2:28 – 3:3  
April 14, 2024 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC  
Rev. Dr. Cathryn Turrentine

If you have ever been to our home, you know that we have a huge family picture wall. It starts at the bottom of the stairs in the living room and goes around the corner and all the way up to the landing on the upper floor. Hardly a square inch of that wall is vacant. Right in the middle of the lower portion of the wall is a Scrabble board, with each of our names spelled out in Scrabble letters, all linking up into a whole. Whenever there is a marriage or a birth, I have to get a new board and figure out a new constellation of names so that everyone is included, everyone is linked, so that everyone – especially the newest – knows they have a place at the heart of this family. And all around this Scrabble board there are pictures.

There is a photo of Dave and me when we first started dating, all dressed up for a formal dance at the university where we worked. Boy, did we look young back then! There are several pictures of ancestors – my great-grandparents' wedding day. My dad as a little boy in the 1930s. Dave's dad in his fishing boat, and his mom in her wedding dress. There are reminders of important events in our lives, too – the day that the airplane Dave built was finally ready to move out of our garage in Virginia and all the people who helped to get it out. There are college graduation photos with proud smiles all around. Wedding pictures are there, too. There is a picture of our son Weldon and his wife Anamika, the diplomat, at the Marine Corps Ball in Mumbai. But mostly the wall is filled to overflowing with lots of silly pictures of everyone playing at our family lake cabin in the summer or roasting marshmallows around our firepit.

Even though they are all my family, you might look at my picture wall and see people who don't look very much alike. We are of different races, for example. And Dave and I married late in life, so our children are step-siblings, a Brady Bunch mixture from different families of origin. Genetically, the members of our family are really not alike at all. You might look at us and just see those differences. But, when I look at these pictures, I can see family resemblances everywhere – across generations and from one family unit to another. I see my son Weldon's scary smart thinking repeated in Walt's son Everett. I see Simon loving to cook as his dad did at that age. I see Logan learning to be an adult in just the same way that his mother Amy did, and I see Luther being a force of nature all his own, but so very clearly connected to the rest of this family. I see children and grandchildren who love one another. Mostly, I see people I love, people who belong to me because of that love. There is nothing that could ever bring me to stop loving them.

Our scripture this morning, from 1 John, is about a different sort of family relationship – that is, our family relationship with God and with one another. The Elder writes, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are." And again, "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."

That is, we are children of God because God loves us. God's love adopts us into God's family. And being God's children makes us in some ways like God.

I want to be clear that we are not children of God in the same way that Jesus was God's son. We did not come to earth from heaven to reveal God's glory to all the world, as he did. But we belong to God because God has chosen to love us, and even people who don't know us very well should be able to look at us and see at least a faint family resemblance between us and God.

How can that be? How can we resemble God, even a little bit? The Gospel of John and the three Epistles of John are clear on this question. We are to love one another. The Gospel of John says it four times. The same commandment appears four times in this first epistle of John. And we read it another time even in the second epistle of John, which is only one page long. This command comes to us most clearly in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus says, "A new

commandment I give to you that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” This is where the family resemblance lies. Love makes us like one another and like God.

That sounds simple, but you know it isn’t always easy to be loving. In our own families, siblings have spats. They have to learn to get along, to understand themselves as part of a family with family expectations and norms. Still, they have spats. Love one another, children. Your brothers and sisters are the ones who will share your memories with you to the end of your life. It is a hard lesson to learn. We have to learn it anyway.

Loving one another was not always easy even in the original Community of the Beloved Disciple, for whom the Gospel of John and the three epistles were originally written. They disagreed vehemently with one another about the most fundamental things – about whether Jesus actually came to earth in the flesh, about how one is to live ethically, about the role of the Holy Spirit as teacher and comforter. Eventually, more than half of that church left. They split, and the ones who left were the ones with most of the money. That split was a huge blow to the community, something that long-time members of this church can understand.

Still, the scripture says, love one another. Even so, love one another. Love one another as Jesus Christ loved us, sacrificially. Love one another as God loves, creatively. Despite differences, or maybe because of them, the Bible says, find a way to look at everyone you meet and see their family resemblance to God. Recognize them as your siblings or cousins in Christ. We, the church, are to be not only the Body of Christ writ large, but also his hands and feet to bring help to those in need. We are to be his heart, revealing God’s love to all. Even when it is challenging. Especially then.

The Prophet Isaiah tells us that we are engraved on the palm of God’s hand. I love that image. It’s sort of the cosmic version of my Scrabble board. Each of us is written on God’s hand, each of us, connected across the lines of God’s palm to everyone else, and each ultimately connected to God. Your name is there, and mine. When God looks at us, God doesn’t see the things that make us different. God sees us as all as people God loves, people who belong to God. We have been adopted into God’s family by the power of God’s love, and there is nothing that could ever bring God to stop loving us.

So, let us show our family resemblance to God in a way that others can see. Brothers and sisters in Christ, now and always, let us love one another, as Christ has loved us.

Amen