

Who Is Your Daddy?

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, January 3, 2010)

John 1:1-14, 16 ¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

A long time ago, maybe even before we started sending stories around on the internet, I received a story that has stuck with me because it provides a very perceptive lesson in life. Of course, the story is true, or at least it claims to be true, and I even recall that it was told by a fairly well-known politician here in the South, who claimed it was his own experience growing up in a small town. Maybe it is true, maybe it isn't. But I believe our Gospel Lesson makes an appearance in this story.

The setting of the story is a small town in the South, a town where everybody knew everybody else, and where everybody knew everybody else's business, and where there was a very, very strong sense of what was right, and what was wrong, sinfully wrong.

There was a young lady who had moved into this town. Folks didn't know too much about her, but everybody knew her because she was one of the waitresses at the little diner on Main Street. And everybody saw when she became pregnant, and everybody knew when she had her baby boy, but nobody knew who the daddy was. Oh there were some folks who had ideas, but nobody could confirm anything, and the young lady wasn't saying a word. She often had to bring the baby along to the diner, and the owner was very accommodating, even to the point where he put a playpen in the corner of the diner where the little guy almost always played quietly and became quite the center of attention, although not all of the attention was completely charitable. There were always

As the boy grew older, the scrutinizing seemed to grow. Some folks would even brashly demand to know, "Who's your daddy, boy? And this frightened the poor little boy, who did not know who his father was, or why all these people kept pressing him about it.

About the time our boy was in 6th or 7th grade, a new preacher was assigned to the one church in town. Folks seemed happy with the new preacher, and our boy overheard some of their praises, so he thought he would slip into church one Sunday and see for himself. There was something about the service that seemed to touch his heart, and when the preacher started telling the stories from Scripture, he was enthralled. Every week he would go to church. He could hardly wait to hear more stories of Jesus and about how God loved everyone. Of course, he waited until the service had started and then would slip in the back door, and he would always get away before the singing of the last hymn. The last thing he wanted was for somebody to grab him and stare into his face, saying, "Who's your daddy, boy?"

Then one Sunday it happened. The last hymn was just beautiful. The melody seemed to just pour over him and the words went right to his heart. He had bowed his head just to let this special feeling wash over him, and then the music stopped and when he looked up, there was the whole choir between him and the door, each one taking their good old time greeting the preacher. He tried to squeeze between an alto and a tenor when a hand reached out from a white robe and caught his shoulder. And now that same voice he loved to hear from the pulpit was speaking directly to him: “Hey there, young man, not so fast. Folks want to say hello to you before you just run out the door, and I especially want to tell you how glad I am to see you here every week.” “What’s your name, young man?”

Our boy replied by just giving his first name, let’s say Joe.

“Joe, hmm,” said our preacher. No family name – who’s your daddy?”

There it was – the dreaded question – but he couldn’t run. The whole choir was surrounding him, looking at him and the preacher’s one hand was on his shoulder, as he placed his other hand under his chin and lifted his face and looked square in his eye. But this look was different. There was kindness in the preacher’s eyes, even a twinkle as he said, “Wait, I can see it, it is just as clear as can be – you’re a child of God!”

That was a turning point in our boy’s life. There was no more shame, no need to hide from the community – he was a child of God. And as I recall the story, he grew up, went to college, studied law, and was elected to a very prominent position in the State government.

Throughout history people have struggled to understand the problem of good versus evil. Cultures, even our own culture, have identified some things as good and some as bad, and oh how some folks just love condemning those things which they think are bad. Greek thought often promoted something called “dualism” which viewed spiritual things as good and worldly things, all worldly things, as bad. That attitude persists even today, although most folks are not as blatant about it as some of the old Mennonites used to be. In fact, if anything was bad or evil those Mennonites would call it “worldly.” Televisions were worldly, chrome bumpers on cars were worldly, buttons were worldly to some, and of course, there were worldly people – you know, those with televisions and chrome bumpers on their cars.

We don’t have many people like that here in Greensboro. We don’t think of anyone as “worldly” but there are a lot of people that we think less of, such as folks who have come from other countries and can’t speak our language, or who might even be in our country illegally. But if you read the entire Gospel of John you will find that God loved the world, and that Jesus came to save the world. You will read that Jesus did not reject those that society rejected. He spoke to the foreign woman living in sin, he touched the untouchable lepers, he ate with tax collectors and sinners. But what is even more important, to us, to each one of us, individually, is that he wants to speak to us, today. Are you listening? He is reaching out to touch us – right now. Can you feel his touch, perhaps in the handshake of a friend, or a pat on the shoulder? He is ready to eat with us again – will you dine with him, as you receive the bread and the cup? And even more important, will you receive him? Will you recognize him; do you know him?

John tells us that Jesus was in the world, yet the world did not know him, and he came to his own, but his own people did not accept him. You should know him – he is your brother. Because God has changed your identity – you are a child of God.

I may have only been here 4 years – but I know who you are – I know each and every one of you, I know your daddy – you are a child of God. Amen.