

Text: 1 John 3:1-11

The week after the resurrection is like the week after Christmas – we have to come down from the mountain top and get back to daily living. God knows we can't stay in the high periods of life. Most of the time we have to get on with the daily chores of this life. But today, this first Sunday after Easter, I want to talk about something that Jesus says to His disciples after He is risen. We find it in the last chapter of Matthew when the risen Lord appears to the women at the grave: "Do not be afraid." In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus appears in the midst of the disciples who are gathered together. When they see Him they are startled and terrified, even though they have just heard the story of His appearance to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. So He says to them, "Why are you frightened and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" The Gospel of John confirms this story. Jesus has to prove who He is by showing the wounds in His hands and feet.

My point here is that doubt and fear are part of our human condition. If the disciples, who had known Him and heard His teachings for three years, had so much fear and doubt, we can take some comfort. But Jesus does not want us to live in fear.

Let's confront what fear is. First, let me briefly deal with the phrase we find throughout the Bible: the fear of the Lord. There are two sides to this fear – negative and positive. If you fear the wrath and judgment of God for your sins, then you need to seek repentance and accept His forgiveness. If you fear that you are not saved and will go to hell for your sins, then you have not believed the Christian message. If, however, you are in awe and reverence and gratitude of the Lord, this is the positive fear of the Lord.

But there is another kind of basic fear that believers and non-believers have – the fear of death. You know how fundamental that is to our nature. I believe the fear of death is behind many other irrational fears that we have – fear of being alone, fear of abandonment, or sickness or accidents and other calamities. We have recently heard of the devastation in Japan and in Alabama and Mississippi. These events happened suddenly with no warning, wreaking devastation in many lives. These events show us how at risk we really are, even when we think we have it all together. We think we are prepared for all contingencies but in a few seconds, life can come to an end.

Now, my friends, I want to tell you a story. This week I read a book that is a best seller – number one on the paperback best-seller list. It's called Heaven Is for Real [by Todd Burpo with Lynn Vincent]. It is about a little boy named Colton, 3 years old, almost 4, who died on the operating table and then was brought back. We have heard a number of stories like this in recent years as our medical technology has increased our ability to resuscitate people. Several years ago a book came out by a pediatric surgeon who honestly set out to disprove these stories that his young patients were telling when they went through one of these experiences. He finally comes to the conclusion that they are real and he becomes a believer in Jesus because of the testimony of his small patients.

But I want to tell you a bit more about Colton. In the months after he came home from the hospital, he starts giving hints about the place he had been. He had been to heaven, had sat in the lap of Jesus, had been sung to by angels and most surprising had met his grandfather and his little sister, both of whom he had never known about. This

was extremely moving to his parents. They had never mentioned the painful loss of a baby in the womb. And now they learned that this child had come and hugged and played with their son, Colton.

But now I reach the point of my sermon today – fear. As parents, we all know the challenge of keeping very young children alive. I give a medal to every parent who has been able to keep alive their children. Some of us succeed and some fail. Little Colton was a typical little boy, a “ball of fire” his father calls him. He had a bad habit of pulling free from his father as they came out of a store at the mall and running to the car. This happened several times which left the father screaming at his son to stop. “You have to wait for us! You have to hold Mommy’s and Daddy’s hand!”

One day coming out of an ice cream store where they had bought cones, Colton bolted for the car again. Again his father screams at him, “Son you can’t do that...How many times have we told you that?”

Just at that point the father notices that lying in the street next to the parking lot is a dead rabbit. So he points to the rabbit and says to Colton, “See that?...That’s a bunny who was trying to cross the street and didn’t make it...That’s what can happen if you run out and a car doesn’t see you! You could not only get hurt; you could die!”

The child looks up at his father and grins. “Oh, good!...That means I get to go back to heaven!”

Then the father makes this statement: “I just dropped my head and shook it, exasperated. How do you scare some sense into a child who doesn’t fear death?”

Now, my friends, what came to me at this point was the story of Jesus in Luke chapter 18.

15. People were bringing even infants to Him that He might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it.

16. But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

17. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

This story gives us food for thought. What does Jesus really mean here? I think Colton can give us some light on the subject. He has no fear of death. He is going to heaven. That attitude makes living this life on earth a very different experience than living in the fear of death.

Colton teaches something further. The father takes his son with him to visit a friend in the hospital who is dying. The family is gathered there. The father prays a moment at the bedside and then turns toward the family. But Colton takes hold of the man’s hand and says, “It’s going to be okay. The first person you’re going to see is Jesus.”

As I was studying this week, I came across a quotation from John Wesley, the great founder of Methodism. He gives us a profound definition of salvation: [quoted in [A Guide to Prayer for All God’s People](#), p. 157]

“By salvation I mean, not barely, according to the vulgar notion, deliverance from hell or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin; a restoration of the soul to its

primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God..."

My friends, he is saying that we return to Eden, to our original purity because of the work of Jesus Christ. We recover our divine nature being in the image of God. As the letter of Jude says, we can stand before God blameless with exceeding joy. But Colton puts it in his own words. When his father asked him why Jesus died on the cross, he said, "Well, Jesus told me he died on the cross so we could go see his Dad."

Finally, my friends, let me contrast fear and the confident certainty of this child. You and I know that in this world we have uncertainty. As I said before, life can change radically in an instant. We have learned that. Let me quote one of my favorite writers, Oswald Chambers: "The nature of spiritual life is that we are certain in our uncertainty... Certainty is the mark of the common-sense life: gracious uncertainty is the mark of the spiritual life. To be certain of God means that we are uncertain in all our ways, we do not know what a day may bring forth. This is generally said with a sigh of sadness; it should be rather an expression of breathless expectation. We are uncertain of the next step, but we are certain of God." [My Utmost for His Highest, April 29]

As you can see, I got my sermon title from this quotation – our trust and confidence in God's gracious gift of salvation gives us certainty in the midst of uncertainty. In our text this morning, John tells us:

2. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. [There is the uncertainty.] What we do know is this: when He is revealed, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is. [There is the certainty.]
3. And all who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure.

We are purified by His purity. He takes away our sins so that we may live in righteousness. If we abide in Him, we love one another. If we live in gracious uncertainty, we have no need to seek power and worldly goods and all the fears and sins which come from this urge. We are certain of our place as a child of God. Sin has lost its power over us because we need nothing but God in Jesus Christ. When the risen Lord Jesus says to His disciples, "Peace be with you," we can know that peace with certainty no matter what may come.

1 John 3:1-11

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.
4. Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.
5. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.
6. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.
7. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

8. Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

9. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; {Or [because the children of God abide in him]} they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.

10. The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

11. For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.