

FUNERAL OF FREDERICK NESKE | NOVEMBER 18, 2022

1 JOHN 3:1-3 | LUKE 10:29-37

1 John, which we just heard from, was written to a community of early believers who were experiencing division in their community. For our purposes here today, the specific issues are not particularly important. But it's worth thinking about what emotions that experience created in them. They were a group of people who could see God at work in their lives sometime in the past, before this division happened. And they could see it sometime in the future, whenever this division was healed. But they had a hard time seeing where God was in their lives right now.

And even if we don't understand the particular issues they were dealing with, I would imagine that many of us can sympathize with how they felt. And so the encouragement we hear in these words has something to say to us as well.

We are children of God, the author writes, because God loves us. We are not children of God because of our own actions or because of our faith or because of our devotion. We are children of God because God loves us.

And because our relationship with God relies on God's grace, not on our own merits, the author can say with confidence that "we are God's children now." The emphasis here is on "now." We are not just God's children in some past or in some far-off future. We are God's children in this moment. For the first people to hear these words, it meant they were God's children even in their time of strife. And for those of us gathered here this morning, it means that even in our grief, even in our frustration, even in our disorientation, we are still God's children. And we are not God's children because we have all the answers or because we are keeping it together or because we handle everything perfectly. We are children of God here and now because God loves us here and now.

This is true for Fred. Not even the power of death cannot extinguish God's love. What will be, the author says, "has not yet been revealed." But they assure us that even in death, we become like Jesus Christ. Because Jesus has been raised from death, we are always in relationship with God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are still loved by God. As St. Paul once put it, "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." Whether we live or whether we die, we are still children of God. So even as we mourn Fred's death, we rejoice that he remains a child of God, still held in the embrace of God's perfect love.

And this is true for us. Grief and loss cannot overcome God's love for us, either. We become like Christ, the author tells us, not just in death but in our lives. When we support one another and care for one another like the Samaritan in today's gospel reading, we are showing the world what love the Father has given us. We are living as children of God. And that is who we are.

So as we commit Fred's body to its resting place this morning, we make our song even at the grave. See what love the Father has given Fred and all of us that—in life and in death—we should be called children of God.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor

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