

Seeing, Really
Real Week 4: 8/24/18
1 John 3:1-3

Welcome/intro/vision

This is week 4 of a five-week series called Real—if you're new today let me get you up to speed on what we've been talking about

Most of us at some point long for a more wonderful REAL, we can picture or long for a world where all kinds of difficult, sad, painful things that we experience here wouldn't ever happen

If you've got little kids maybe you long for a world where toddlers didn't throw temper tantrums!

Or maybe you're at the stage where you long for a world where teenagers listened to their parents!

Or maybe you're at the stage where you long for a world where college tuition didn't cost quite so much!

I think it's gone up by a couple of thousand dollars in the 30 minutes you've been sitting here, by the way...

Or maybe you're at the stage where you long for your aging parents to not experience quite so much pain and so many humbling doctor's visits

We long for a more real and more really wonderful world.

We not only want what is real OUT THERE, most of us at some level would love a more consistently REAL us

Some days I wake up and I'm charming and wonderful and sort of my best version of myself
And other days I wake up and I'm anxious or cranky or self-absorbed
Which one is the REAL me? Probably depends on who you ask!

But occasionally I long for a more settled, more REAL version of me, not the shadow or broken version of me

We both want a world that's really wonderful and we want to BECOME really wonderful, not a shadow of who we were made to be. How and where does that happen?

The story of Christianity is that Jesus is the most real human being who ever lived and that he is the one who has come to invite us into the REAL that we long for

the journey of becoming the REAL US that he made us to be, not a shadow or broken version of us that we currently are

AND he has come to invite us into the WONDERFULLY REAL world that we all long for—a community of the real where real life is

We're spending a few weeks in a little letter in the New Testament where the author, a guy named John who was one of Jesus's closest friends

And John is a little bit obsessed over helping his readers get to what is really REAL

Today, John is going to invite us to do something that at first sounds really simple, but it turns out is much more difficult than it sounds

John is going to invite us to come to wrestle with who we think of ourselves as and who we actually are

Bible/No Bible/New to the Bible: 1 John 3

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

John is writing to churches across the Med

most of the people getting these letters are new to faith, new to Christianity, they've come from a variety of other religious backgrounds, and they're trying to understand and SEE what this Christianity thing really means and what it's all about

John invites his readers and us today to SEE two things:

1. **God's great love**
2. Demonstrated by the new name God's given to us: **children of God**, that, John declares, is who we are on the other side of Christ

Anyone remember those magic eye posters that were popular back in the 90's? There's this crazy busy pattern with all this stuff happening on it

But if you looked long enough and relaxed your eyes you were supposed to be able to see an image that eventually popped out in 3-D

Now I'm a little colorblind, so I was always terrible at these things

so I actually don't know what's on these images up here and hopefully I'm not putting anything up here on the screen that's utterly scandalous, you'll have to let me know afterwards

In my experience, the only way that I could usually 'see' the picture embedded in these things was if someone pointed it out to me

If someone came along and pointed something out, I could start to see it: Can you see right there is the nose of the cow or the flock of seagulls or Barney or Mozart or whatever it was

Having someone point out what I was supposed to be seeing helped me to actually see what was already real, already there, but I was struggling to see it

What I want to suggest to you is that when it comes to **your identity**, who you really are, you've been swirling in a MAGIC EYE POSTER sea of names and identities all of your life

Your name your parents named you when you were born and then you've gotten names and picked up identities in every age and every stage

You were a **good sleeper** or a **bad sleeper**; you were **verbal** or you were **non-verbal**, you were **sweet** or you were **feisty** or you were **colicky** or you were an **easy baby** or you were **high-maintenance**

look like mom or look like dad

And as you got older, you got into school mode and you picked up a whole bunch more names and identities to add to this swirl:

gifted, average, below average; athletic; Bookish, artsy, cool; awkward; band geek, drama nerd, partier;

Drop Out, Graduate, employee

accepted to dream-school or rejected by dream school; "my major is: "

plumber, teacher, project manager, IT person,

coach, spouse, single, divorced, widowed, re-married,

parent, grandparent,

successful, not-so-successful, middle-management

retired, wish-I-was-retired,

Mac or PC,

American, POLITICS: Republican, Democrat, None-of-the-above,

[insert favorite sports team here identity],

rich, poor, middle-class,

white, latino, African-American, native American

[insert personality type here: ENFJ, Enneagram 3, Activator]

CONSUMER

Some of you picked up names that we're not allowed to say in church! ***&#!@\$*#**

Yikes! What do you do with that?

And some of us picked up some awful names

names that because of either who said them or how they were said or when they were said

have been seared into our memories and have played on loop in our heads over and over and over again

Your **Shame Names** that some of us have never been able to shake or that have limited you or shaped you in some way, never for the better

In my own life growing up, I was blessed and cursed with a younger brother who was and is freakishly smart—I was pretty good at school without trying too hard, he blew the top off of school without trying too hard

And no one ever overtly said anything about him being the smarter one, no one ever said to me “why aren’t you as smart as your brother?”

But no one needed to. I knew it. And I gave myself the name **not as smart as my brother**
No one gave this to me, I just knew that this was true

So here’s what happened to me:

for many years because I was the one who wasn’t as smart as my brother I really under-
sold myself on the fact that while I wasn’t as smart as my brother, I was still very capable of
learning things!

I’m still not the smartest person in the world, that’s fine. But I love to learn and if I roll
up my sleeves and go to work at it I can learn all kinds of things!

But it took me many years to shake that old name, and I wasted many years of school laboring
under this name of “not as smart as my brother”

when what I needed to be doing was figuring out what it would look like to actually be
as smart as I could be!

THIS NAME limited me, I gave it to myself AND it was true, but how I interpreted it and
internalized it and acted on it was totally undermining me!

HAVE YOU EVER PUT ON A NAME THAT IN RETROSPECT WAS A MISTAKE? AN IDENTITY THAT
UNDERMINED YOU?

What John’s saying is in the middle of this magic eye poster where it’s all swirling together
is that there’s this one thing that’s most important that we need to really, really SEE if
we’re going to experience and know the REAL that we made for and long for

When these people came to trust and follow Christ, something new happened in their lives,
they were given a new name, a new identity that re-orders and re-orientes and re-organizes
every other identity

SEE! Because of God’s great love for us we are now called **Children of God**

THAT is what we are! This is like a magnet dropped in on a bunch of iron filings—
everything else is ordered around that identity, everything else needs to either serve THIS
identity or it needs to go

Many of these other identities are more tangible and many of them are more visceral, you can
really feel them, and many of them scream at you “I matter more than these others!”

And this whole children of God thing doesn’t do this for most of us—for most of us, the idea
that we might be or are or could be sounds more like wallpaper in our mental map of who we
are

rather than the thing that’s front and center

But John is adamant—THIS is most important. This is what matters.

This is a picture of God's great love, the tangible expression of God's great love, that we should be called this new name: children of God

Now there's 3 different ways that we don't SEE the wonder of this. 3 reasons why we DON'T see the way that John wants us to see and why we miss this

1. Of COURSE I'm a child of God—aren't we all?

This is a great and important objection to what John's writing here. John is saying here and otherwise something very controversial:

BEFORE we met Christ, we weren't children of God, but NOW, after Christ, we are

Throughout the New Testament Jesus's disciples are piecing together **what was the problem that God was solving by sending his Son to die on a cross and then be raised again on the third day?**

And there's a number of ways that they answer that question but the **number one thing that they talk about is this work of FORGIVENESS that leads to RECONCILIATION and ADOPTION**

The relationship between God and human beings has been ruptured from our end. You don't have to look very far to see that's the case!

There are any number of ways that we see that playing out on the national and global stage AND in our own personal lives as you and I occasionally resist living in the light

We choose darkness over and over again:

little lies and big ones, little gossips and big juicy gossips, little bits of manipulation and big acts of manipulation

our pride and insecurity and anxiety and ambition all push us to do things that take us out of the light, we choose darkness regularly

If we took every thought I'd had for the past 48 hours and put it on the screen, you'd see plenty of ways darkness is at work in me!

The Scriptures describe that as sin, as being in a state of separation and broken relationship. Everyone was originally made in God's image to be and live like children of God—that's the real us

But we've taken the money and run, taken that image-bearing thing that we've all been gifted with

And taken the gifts and abilities and opportunities put them to use for things OTHER than what God intended them for

ANALOGY: Let's say that you were extremely wealthy.

And OF COURSE if YOU were extremely wealthy YOU would be WAY more generous than every OTHER selfish wealthy person—you'd be glad to use your money to help other people!

And you've got a family member who loves to knit **purposefully ugly sweaters** who wants to open a small business selling their purposefully ugly sweaters and they need a little loan to help get them started

You're maybe not a huge fan of intentionally ugly sweaters, but you love this person and you know that there are some people out there who are into that sort of thing

So you give them a small loan with wonderfully low interest rates to get the business off the ground

But let's say that person took that loan

and instead of opening the business like they'd planned, instead they took off and set up a new home in lovely, scenic Boise Idaho

to be a **subsistence potato farmer** with no hope of ever paying off that loan

THAT would be a breach of relationship

You've given them a gift within the context of a relationship for a purpose, and as your ne'er do well family member takes the money and goes off and does something different with it than what was intended

There's both an ethical and relational break that's been initiated by the new potato farmer—they have no intention of paying you back and they've broken the relationship with you

This is kind of the Biblical story of humanity. We were made in God's image and each of us wired up with great gifts and abilities

And what was intended was that people made in God's image would introduce something of God's goodness into this world with each and every single thing that they ever did

Every email, every word spoken, every project you work on, every interaction with your spouse or your kids or your co-workers or neighbors, every time you drive your car

Let's take a quick look around!

Are people around us always and consistently expressing something of God's goodness and power and courage and love with every interaction, every email, every Facebook post, every Tweet, every time they drive? No way! Not even close!

And then, let's take a look at our own lives: are WE always and consistently taking the great gifts God has given to us and worshiping God by putting them to use to make this world to flourish?

That's not the kind of week I've had, I don't know about you.

We take the gifts and the image God's put at the core of each of us, and we take those gifts and we run off and use them however we want, breaking relationship with God

And very often and very regularly breaking relationships with one another in the process

All of that puts us in debt to the one who's given us the gifts in the first place

And it's a relational break from the God who made us, loves us, and gave us those gifts to begin with that we might share in this work together with Him!

And so very often SIN in the Bible is described as DEBT OWED

And the work of Christ on the cross is often described as paying off a debt for us that we owe that we could never repay

Jesus taught us to pray that God would forgive us our debts or our trespasses—either one implicates us in violating or transgressing some expectation or boundary with how we're living!

And the work of Christ on the cross is often described as a reconciling RELATIONAL work, restoring us both in almost economic terms as he pays off our debt

AND relational terms to bring us back into the place that we were ORIGINALLY made to start out in—to be called the children of God.

And so to those of us who say to John "Aren't we all children of God?"

John I think would say, "In the beginning, we were all meant to be. And we're all still made in God's image and wired up with God-sized wonderful gifts to make this world more beautiful

But that relationship has been damaged and is in need of repair.

And the good news is, John would say, that God so loved the world and all of these image-bearers in it who are off starting potato farms when he intended much better for them

He so loved us lost potato-farming image-bearers that he sent his Son to die on the cross to forgive our debts and to reconcile and restore us to the position in the cosmos we were intended to be

Behold what GREAT love the Father has lavished, poured out, extravagantly and recklessly inundated us with: that while we were taking God's image and God's gifts and doing our own thing with them

He did the forgiving and reconciling work that would enable us to be adopted BACK into the place we were made for in the beginning.

That we should be called children of God

This leads us to reason #2 why some of us miss SEEING the power and wonder of what John's saying here

If **Objection #1** is "Of course I'm a child of God—isn't everyone?"

Objection #2 is the equal and opposite little voice: **“No way I could be a child of God”**

This cuts a couple of different ways:

Sometimes people have done horrific things that they know are horrific, and they've got all this **shame and guilt**

I've been told by others that shame plays out in different cultures in some different ways, so if you're coming from a non-white culture you can help me after the service for ways this plays out in different culture

But in white culture **guilt is feeling bad about stuff we've DONE**
SHAME is feeling bad about who we are

And in some of us, we feel the weight of either or both of these so much that we feel like we're disqualified from John's celebration here

The Jesus way has good news and bad news all rolled into one piece of news for those of us who struggle with this feeling that there's no way we could be children of God

You are so very loved...and you are not this special

The offer of forgiveness and reconciliation and restoration is on offer to the WHOLE WORLD, every single person, and you're not the LONE person in all of history who it doesn't apply to

Do you carry around guilt over things you've done? There is no error that you can invent with more power than the cross. Jesus forgave the people who were crucifying him as he was being crucified!

If he can forgive that, he can forgive you, whatever you've done

Do you carry around voices of shame for who you are?

Shortly after his resurrection, he healed the shame of his best friend Peter who denied knowing him three times when he most needed someone to stand by him

After that, Peter had all these voices in his head that told him he was a FAILURE, which he actually was. But Jesus gave him a new task and a new name: feed my sheep, go be a shepherd

To the friend who failed him when he most needed a friend, he gave that failure a new name, he can take all your names and change them, too.

This morning I'm here to tell you the good news that you are so very loved but you are not that special

You do not have the creativity or the power to do anything or be anything that is beyond the ability of the God of the universe to reach into it and do something new

And the love and lavish grace of God comes in this wonderful transaction that we're invited into: we bring Jesus all our shame, bring Jesus all your guilt

He takes it off of us so that guilt and shame no longer are the defining characteristics of our lives

And we in exchange receive this wonderful new name, lavished on you through the great love of the Father: **you are a child of God**

There's a third way we miss seeing the way that John wants us to see, and perhaps this one is the most pervasive of all: **Ambivalence**

There's a giant 'so what' to all of this. What difference does this make? It all feels pretty removed and theoretical

Here's why this matters—in **this sea of** all these different identities, at various points in your life you're going to test-drive different ones of them

And at different points you'll rotate through these different identities and like goldilocks what often happens is we find that each identity has its flat-sides, the diminishing returns

this identity is a little too hard and driven. This identity is a little too soft. This identity is too feeble and weak to energize me. This identity is too temporary

When my identity was identity was "not as smart as my brother" I kept trying to find ANOTHER name that would fit me better that I could build on

I was an above average athlete in several different sports, could I be the **athlete?** of the family? But then I tried lots of things and there were always people better than me at everything

And so I tried some other names on for size: **writer? leader? 'the nice one?'**

in an effort to find a name that I could build my identity around that would be strong enough to carry me

And what happens is we cycle through these different identities over the course of our lives and we try to build our little kingdoms around them and we consistently find ways that they fall short over and over and over again

Some of them are good for a season but then that season passes.

I was talking with a new empty nester just this week who's processing how to move forward when the identity of PARENT which is a great one no longer applies in the same way.

If your whole identity is as a parent to kids and then those kids become adults, you become the parent who can't let their kids grow up—you need them to still need you because your identity is built around being a parent

Some of these names and identities were terrible and destructive from the beginning and we need to be delivered from them

And none of them are magnificent enough to carry us for a lifetime

Because all of them fall short of who we were made to be in the beginning, all of them fail to activate in us the deepest, truest, realest things that God has put in us

Every other identity is too unstable and has too short a shelf-life to build your whole life around.

Only this one is rooted in something so big it can last for an eternity, only this identity has the gravitas and strength to carry you for your whole life and beyond

What's real? In Christ Jesus, Really, you are a child of God. See it, trust it, let that identity put every other identity into their proper place

Today's Take-WITH

SEE: Name your swirl of names and identities: what have you tried to build your identity around?

SEE: How are those identities short-lived, unstable, or actually destructive?

SEE: The love the Father has lavished on us that we might be children of God!