

# Welcome to the Family!

Message for Sunday, January 29, 2017  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** 1 John 4:7-12; Ephesians 1:4-5

## Children's Message:

(Before the service, set up an elaborate track of dominoes, with diverging branches. Perhaps invite children to look after this; they will enjoy the challenge.)

Do you know how it's possible to spread germs? (one person, directly or indirectly, passes them on to another person, who passes them on to another person, and so on).

The same thing is true with spreading unhappiness. Suppose I'm feeling rotten and mean. I see you and I call you a mean name, and maybe even do something mean to you. Now I hope you wouldn't do this, but I've seen it happen: you now feel unhappy, and when you meet someone else, you say something nasty to them.

But it doesn't have to be that way. You can spread love and joy that way, too!

And it all begins with God loving us:

1 John 4:7, New International Version:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

If you know with all your heart that God loves you, then nothing that anyone else does will be able to take away that love and joy. And you will always have some to share with others.

God's love is like these popcorn bags that just came out of the microwave. They make us feel warm all over. They give us comfort, and help us to relax and sleep. It's a good feeling! God's love is like that: it fills us, warms us, and helps us to love others.

It's like these dominoes. It begins here, and spreads all around. Let's see how it works! (One of the children pushes the first domino!)

**Message:** "Welcome to the Family!"

I heard about a very dynamic preacher who began a sermon with this introduction:

Today I am going to answer the unanswerable;  
I will fathom the unfathomable;  
I will unscrew the inscrutable!

That must have been a very deep message with profound meaning. Today's message is nothing like that. It's very, very simple.

I said last week that starting today, we're going to look at the mission statement for St. Paul's Church. There are three parts to it, and today we're looking at just the first part.

We are called to be children of God, living in a faith family that supports each other, the communities in which we live, and the world.

Actually, we're going to look at just the opening statement: "We are called to be children of God."

## 1) God loves you

1 John 4:7-12, New Living Translation:

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God — for God is love.

God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love has been brought to full expression through us.

Do you see all the underlines in that passage? That's wherever it mentions God's love. Do you get the message? God *really* loves you!

The next part of our mission statement says we are in "a faith family that supports each other." That's good. Loving each other is very good. But it's not enough. If we try to love just on our own, we will quickly grow weary and disillusioned. There are some days I'm not a very lovable person, and I'm sure you have days like that. Loving cranky people will wear you out!

Let's read again the first line of that Bible verse from 1 John 4:

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God.

The key to loving others is that our love is grounded in God's love for us. The supply is endless, and the magnitude is infinite.

## 2) God's plan for your life is to love you

Back on December 18, in my message that Sunday—you *do* remember what I spoke about that day, don't you?☺—I described my relationship with Jane before we were married. I told how Jane still said she loved me, even after she came to my apartment and saw two weeks of dirty dishes piled on the kitchen counter. What I didn't tell you, though, is that some time before that Jane had made up a list of what would make an ideal husband. Two things she was absolutely certain about: she would never marry a doctor or a minister! How we ever got together is one of God's wonderful mysteries.☺

But it has always been God's plan to love you. That has never changed.

**Ephesians 1:4-5, New Living Translation:**

**Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ.**

God always intended to love you. God always planned for you to be part of his family. In fact, he created you for this very purpose.

If you want to discover your purpose in life, this is crucial. Many people think their purpose is to make lots of money, achieve success, become happy. I'll tell you what your purpose is: to be loved by God, to be part of God's family. That's why God created you.

If you're living for any other reason than to enjoy a love relationship with God, you're missing out on your real purpose in life.

About 100 years ago the well-known evangelist, Charles Finney, was holding a series of evening services in a church in Detroit. One evening he preached on the text "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin" [1 John 1:7]. After the service a stranger asked Charles to walk home with him. Even though church leaders who knew this man warned Charles not to do it, he went with the man.

The stranger ushered the preacher into the rear of a building, then locked the door and put the key in his pocket. He turned and said, "Don't be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to ask a few questions. Do you believe what you preached tonight?"

Charles said, "I most certainly do."

The man continued, "We're in the back of a saloon. I'm sole proprietor. Mothers come in here, lay their babies on the counter, and beg me not to sell liquor to their husbands. I turn a deaf ear to their cry. We see to it when a man leaves here he's well under the influence. More than one night, a man leaving here has been killed by the express train at the railroad tracks. Charles, tell me, can God forgive a man like me?"

Charles replied, "I have but one authority, the Word of God, which says, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.'"

"But that's not all," added the man. "In another room we run a gambling hall. If a man doesn't spend all his money on liquor, we bring him back here and with marked cards and rigged tables we see to it that he's fleeced out of his last dollar. We send him home penniless to a hungry family. Charles, I'm the sole owner, and this is all my doing. Tell me honestly: can God forgive a man with a heart like that?"

Again Charles replied, "I have but one authority, the Word of God, which says, 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.'"

The man spoke again. "That's not all. Across the street is my home where live my wife and little daughter. Neither one has had a kind word from me for five years. Their bodies bear marks of my brutal attacks. Charles, do you think God could forgive a man with a heart like that?"

Charles' head lowered. His eyes filled with tears as he said, "My friend, you have painted one of the darkest pictures I have ever gazed on, but I still have one authority which says, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.'"

The man opened the door, ushered the preacher into the night, but he himself didn't arrive home until daybreak—not until after he had ripped up the decks of marked cards, smashed the crooked gambling tables to pieces, and poured the contents of every bottle down the sink.

Across the road at home he sat in his living room. His little girl called, "Daddy, Mother says to tell you that breakfast is ready." When he answered his little girl kindly she ran back to her mother, "Something is the matter with Daddy! He was nice to me!" The mother followed her little girl to the living room. The man beckoned them both. Taking one on each knee, he explained to their amazement that they had a new husband and daddy.

That evening the whole family went to that church, where they agreed to all together give their lives to Jesus Christ. Years later, when asked to tell how his life was changed, the man would reply simply, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin."

Today we welcomed Sondra and Hugh, Mary, Gloria and Peter into our church family. God wants everyone to be part of his family. God wants everyone to know his love. If you've never taken the step of trusting Jesus to be your Lord, of being part of his church, I encourage you to do that. It's God's plan for your life, and has been ever since you were born, and even before that.

#### **Next Steps:**

- Receive God's gift of love, of forgiveness, of new life.
- Enjoy having God as a friend. Spend time together, do things together.
- Enjoy being part of God's family, the church.