

Easter III - 2024

Epistle: 1 John 3:1-7

¹See 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. ²Beloved, 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. ³And 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. ⁵You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

"Beloved, we are God's children now" In the name...

This is a funny sermon, but I want to build a possible case for understanding. I'll forgive my leaning on classic author.

When I read of the children of God, for whatever reason, I think of the children of one author—as a metaphor; as an example. Having written extensively about Dickens as a biography, I have this quote:

"No man encouraged his characters as much as Dickens. 'I am an affectionate father,' he says, 'to every child of my fancy.' He was not only an affectionate father, he was an ever-indulgent father. The children of his fancy are spoilt children. They shake the house like heavy and shouting schoolboys; they smash the story to pieces like so much furniture. When we moderns write stories our characters are better controlled...When we experience the ungovernable sense of life which goes along with the old Dickens sense of liberty, we experience the best of the revolution. We are filled with the first of all democratic doctrines, that all humans are interesting; Dickens tried to make some of his people appear dull people, but he could not keep them dull. He could not make a monotonous man or a withering woman. The bores in his books are brighter than the wits in other books (Chesterton)." Chesterton reminds us that the fierce poet of the Middle Ages wrote, "Abandon hope all ye who enter here," over the gates of the lower world—over hell. Dickens was born into a world which had the same written over England, but Dickens fought with a humaneness: "abandon hopelessness, all ye who enter here (G.K.)."

The irreplaceable and unrepeatabe Boz. The brilliance in the room. The inimitable. And, above and beyond every other description, simply the great, hard-working writer, who set nineteenth-century London before our eyes and who noticed and celebrated

the small people living on the margins of society—the Artful Dodger, Smike, the Marchioness, Nell, Barnaby, Micawber, Mr Dick, Jo the crossing sweeper, Phil Squod, Miss Flite, Sissy Jupe, Charley, Amy Dorrit, nandy, hairless Maggie, Sloppy, Jenny Wren the dolls’ dressmaker. After he had been writing for long hours at Wellington Street, he would sometimes ask his office boy to bring him a bucket of cold water and put his head into it, and his hands. Then he would dry his head with a towel, and go on writing.”
(Tomalin)

So blah, blah Dickens. He was an affectionate father! Oh how he loved Pip in *Great Expectations*! Oh how he loved him! He would weep as he wrote. And how did he write about his children?

Christmas cheer must come to terms with a cruel world.

These children, Ignorance and Want, are the terrible offspring of the Gospel of Mammonism

Compassion must precede magnanimity

Humor is love.

They reveal to us that God takes a humorous view of mankind. In humor there is both tolerance and encouragement.

He establishes laughter as an essential duty for the pious.

Every human oddity Dickens creates should be seen as an offering of thanks to God who created him.

If tears are the alms of gentle spirits, and may be counted, as sure they may, among the sweetest of life’s charities,—of that kindly sensibility, and sweet sudden emotion, which exhibits itself at the eyes, I know no such provocative as humour. It is an irresistible sympathizer; it surprises you into compassion: you are laughing and disarmed, and suddenly forced to tears.

The Dickensian categorical imperative: Laugh until you’re breathless and your sides ache and everyone else in the room laughs with you. The laughing heart is the surest human connection to a loving Divinity. It fortifies souls inclined to despondency or despair with a saving courage; a grace is available to all those willing to choose levity over misery.

Dickens loved being alive, knew his life was a divine gift, and propagated that love and that knowledge wherever he went.

So that’s enough about Dickens, but do you see the parallel?? Let me read again the Scriptures to you:

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of the One great Author of Life.
Beloved, you are children! And you are ten times the fancy of your heavenly Father! If children now, John writes, then Kings and Queens in the age which is to come! Hope in this is a purifying hope—that's the nature of the Gospel. That's the nature. Hope in God that believes all charity for others, that believes all love for that which is Good, begets a hope so profound and intense that the hope itself is purifying. That hope is available. Don't be lawless—and the law here is love. To be deceived is to be suspicious of love—the kind of love that rips up my sin of cynicism, for example (which hurts), and replaces it with a joy that doesn't need an object outside of God. God as God. God is the Gospel, here, because we are permanent children in a household of grim indifference. To be delivered from that is to be delivered from everything.

That hope—that righteousness—is available right here. Children are beloved because they are beloved. Not because they have spent a lifetime earning favor. You are enough because God has justified you at that font and at this table. We need not self justify. You are the children of his fancy. Little children, come to his altar. You are beloved.