

*My little children.* A sermon preached at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, October 2, 2016 , Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: HOSEA 11:1-9  
I JOHN 2:1-2

What is something that everyone here this morning has in common?

Every person has and no one is excluded?

Are all of us baptized Presbyterians?

Are all of us Christians?

Are all of us Canadian citizens? Maybe not

What is the ONE experience that we know for sure?

That every single person has had?

Yes, we all breathe, drink water, and eat food to stay alive.

But that is not the common item about which I am thinking right now

*Every single person here in this room has in common with each other the fact that every person in this room has experienced childhood*

*All of us have been or are children!*

Not all of us are parents

Not all of us have been mothers or fathers or sisters or brothers.

BUT common to every person here is the fact that every person here in this room has been or is a child!

Now for some being a child and childhood carries some very heavy and unpleasant baggage and memories.

This needs to be acknowledged.

But for most to be a child is to have fun, to play, to be creative, and imaginative.

To explore the world around us

Wonder, fascination and awe are part of being a child.

To be a child,

Again for most of us is to be loved.

It is also to know how dependent and vulnerable we really are.

A child is basically helpless

A child needs nurturing.

A child is dependent

When Jessica began the reading from John's first letter, some of us,

Like John's first readers might have bristled and taken issue with John's words

I'm no child! I am an adult! I have responsibilities, people who depend upon me, important people

People like the Donald, would be really ticked to have a tweet, twitter or email begin with the words,

"my little child" – even if it was the apostle John himself

That said, there are times, places and individuals who can use the phrase, “my little children” and not be accused of patronizing, insulting or condescending behavior. Rather, the phrase is a sign of love, endearment and concern.

I suggest this is one of those times that signify love, endearment and concern – of John to his readers – then and now  
John was no wet behind the ears, young punk – always wanting to look good and put others in their place.

No, John was first and foremost a pastor,  
A servant of Jesus Christ, who sought always to serve,  
Always to lift up Jesus so that all might be drawn to him.

MY LITTLE CHILDREN is then not a phrase to alienate and put people off.

No, it is a respectful, concerned and affectionate greeting – based upon real concern and life experience.

It is the greeting of a mature in years and in the faith individual who knows the frailty of human nature,

Who knows the fine line believers walk to follow Jesus’s ways over the strident chirps and whistles of the worlds’ voices.

John knows the two dangers that always confront God's people – complacency and hopelessness or compromise and depression.

John knows it is really difficult a lot of the time to keep balance,

An even keel – just to be steady, strong and secure

So what he says to his readers – then and now – are words of command and comfort,

Exhortation and consolation

Objective and promise!

John begins what we know as chapter 2 of the first letter by picking up on a crucial matter – *the matter of sin*

Make no mistake, for John, as for all believers ought to be the case, sin is not some innocent little bad habit!

Sin is those wedges or breaks we allow, get caught up in and by,

In our relationship with God, others and ourselves.

Sin is living as if God does not exist.

It is to walk in darkness

It is to break fellowship with God

Sin always leads to an evil conscience.

Sin ultimately robs us of happiness and joy –

whatever pleasure we may feel committing sin is indeed very fleeting.

Sin provides fertile ground for doubt about one's self-worth.

At times,

To sin and not do anything to confess it will make you feel uncertain of your relationship with God

For example, unconfessed sin can make you feel you have no right to pray,

It always leads ultimately to a sense of utter hopelessness .

John knows all this and more

He has himself probably wrestled with unconfessed sin.

If St. Paul is correct – and I believe him so to be – **all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Roms 3:21)**

Then we know unconfessed sins' power to corrode, lessen, and denigrate the individuals God so wants each of us to be

That truth still holds – *unconfessed sin still has the power to corrode our relationship with God, others and within ourselves.*

Sin then is something we must as God's people take seriously.

There is nothing innocent, or fluffy about sin

Sin is very serious – however encased in attractive containers of rationalization it often is

**I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin (vs. 1)**

But John also realizes that there will be times and occasions,

Circumstances and events that will cause us to drive those wedges into our relationship with God, others, and within ourselves.

He therefore does not write us off as useless, apostate or unworthy of God's love

Quite the opposite really – *he reminds us of an important truth*

*In our helplessness, need* **(my little children)** we are not cut off nor abandoned

Rather,

**...if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world**  
**(1b-2)**

There's the gospel in a nutshell – impressively set out.

Without the Lord Jesus Christ we can do nothing.

It is in Him alone that we are rescued

It is in Him alone that we are forgiven.

In is He alone and what He has done for us who covers all our sins and does away with them – forgiveness!

It is so simple, yet so profound.

Little wonder is it that Charles Wesley wrote so evocatively about it in his hymn about Peter being set free from literal chains and wove that story into

the experience of all and any who have realized the depth of God's love in Christ for us – first!

Wesley' 'And can it be that I should gain #352

Look particularly at verses 1 and 5

Not simple words on a page, rather scripture set to music – Wesley brothers – Charles and John were particularly good at matching lyrics and tunes

*Vs, 1 Amazing love! How can it be,  
That thou, my God shouldst die for me*

*Vs. 5 No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*

God acts out of his love for us – **my little children** is therefore a most appropriate address to John's readers – then and today.

It is a phrase that underscores God is not against us  
God is not out to zap us if we step out of line  
God is not insisting on His pound of flesh and his right to punish us for our sins – and God is within his rights to do just that!!

No, here John reminds us '...**we have an advocate** – one who represents us to God.

When we have sinned...and are full of a sense of shame and guilt.

We feel we have no right to go back to God,  
remember God in Christ has become your Father,  
We have an advocate **with the Father**.

Jesus Christ **the righteous**.

Jesus does not merely ask God to overlook our sin or forget it.

Jesus stands there to say to God – it is right and just that you should forgive the sins of these people,

For **I** have borne their sins and the punishment of their sins.

The law has been fulfilled,

The death has been died,

The punishment has been enacted,

These people are free because **I did for them**.

There is mystery, wonder and awe here.

For we are speaking of nothing less than God's action on our behalf first.

God in Christ does this for us,

Not because we are owed it,

or deserve it

Not because we are entitled to it.

Not because we've checked all the correct boxes or given the 'right answers'

No, he has done this for us, for each of us, for all time, because he is God

That is the way,

And the only way, whereby any one of us can ever come and remain in fellowship with God (vs.3) of the letter's first chapter.

**My little children** John says to us  
Accept, believe and live daily in the light of this truth and its full implications for you, for me, for all people, for all time.  
That is the call and that remains the challenge!!