

Message and Scripture
21 April 2024

Scripture: 1 John 3:1-7 FET

¹ See what love Abba God has lavished us in letting us be called God's children! Yet that in fact is what we are. The reason the world does not recognize us is that it never recognized God. ² My dear friends, now we are God's children, but it has not yet been revealed what we are to become in the future. We know that when it comes to light we will be like God, for we will see God as God really is. ³ All who keep this hope keep themselves pure, just as Christ is pure.

⁴ Anyone who sins at all breaks the Law, because to sin is to break the Law. ⁵ Now, you know that Christ, who is sinless, appeared to abolish sin. ⁶ So everyone who lives in union with Christ does not continue to sin, but whoever continues to sin has never seen or known Christ.

⁷ Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray; to live a holy life is to be holy, just as Christ is holy.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God.

Message: We Purify in Hope

Last week we started looking at what 1 John had to say to us today. We talked about walking in the light or walking in love. How we are called upon to try and make choices in our everyday lives that add to light and joy instead of darkness or despair. I invoked the old saying, "I don't care how high you jumped – just how straight you walk." In conversion – if you have experienced a conversion experience – you feel like everything is shiny and new. But then life happens. Old thought processes – old habits – old friends and old ways of life happen – life hasn't miraculously changed – the kin-dom hasn't yet arrived – how do we manage this and our own expectations. How do we settle down to walk in love after the newness of feeling God's grace goes away?

Easter is somewhat the same way. Some of us have spent Lent reminding ourselves of the need to work spiritual disciplines into our lives – to read the Bible, pray regularly, give generously with our time, talents and finances, witness to others about our faith - and now several weeks after Easter – there sit all of my good intentions – gathering dust.

Like exercise equipment – App on my phone...good intentions...I need to be refined to work towards the purity of perfection. – One of the jokes of our ordination process -? about going on to perfection in this lifetime – the proper answer is yes – but most of us don't really believe we can be perfected this side of heaven – but that doesn't mean we shouldn't work towards it.

Last night at Dryden High School, I attended the Jazz and dessert night. Both Jo and Zach participated. They actually both presented the same song. Somehow without noticing, the 7th and 8th grade singers and the High School Clarinet Band both picked Louis Armstrong's, "It's a Wonderful Life" to present. And then performed directly after each other. So much for going on to perfection, or purifying/refining ourselves in hope!

But the music spoke to me. Kids and adults played throughout the evening from middle school through adults. We were all treated to a set from the Fall Creek Band as the evening's finale. And the music was wonderful...and one could tell which set of musicians had been playing (or singing) the longest. No one was bad. No one was off tempo or off key – but not one of the groups would have described their set, their song, their performance, as perfect. And yet, musicians strive for perfection – just as we are to strive for perfection. Right?

And that striving means practicing. Sona (Evangeline and Kate), do you come into worship and play cold – or do you practice each week? To play well, and to continue to play well, one needs to practice. The best musicians are always practicing their craft and learning.

This is true in other places as well. The Olympics are coming this summer in Paris. None of the athletes expect perfection without practice. In fact, none of the athletes truly expect perfection tho they strive for it. So should we. Like athletes, like musicians we need to practice – we need to strive for perfection in our walk of discipleship.

I don't know what this means for you. Each of us is different. My eldest plays the Bass Clarinet wonderfully and I am proud of them, but their level of musicianship is not at the same standard as the Fall Creek Band because the Fall Creek Band is a bunch of adults who have had so many more years of practice and experience. Jo's practice routines are going to be different from theirs. The members of the Fall Creek Band have different practice needs than Sona/Evangeline. If I were to try and pick up an instrument again, my practice needs would be massively different. Which doesn't make any of us better than any others, just different people with different needs.

And to extend the metaphor, a musician's need to practice is different than an athlete's. They both need to practice, they may even put in the same number of hours practicing, but they practice different things entirely. Not everyone is the same. Each of us has different parts to play, different places in our spiritual, mental, emotional, and yes even physical lives that we need to purify – that we need to work on - on our path of discipleship.

I know some of mine – yes – you may not believe this, but your pastor is not perfect. Obviously. I know I need to work on my walk of discipleship. I know very well what some of my faults and bad habits are. And I also know that Jesus is walking with me, no matter where I am on my journey to perfection, even when I am getting it wrong, even when I am forgetting to put in the hours of practice, even when I am too tired, too lazy, too busy, too stressed, too old, too young, too mature or immature, too **whatever** to do the work of refining my character and myself. Jesus is still there right beside me – like a coach, a teacher, a mentor, a friend – urging me on – showing me what perfection looks like and giving me hope.

Jesus gives me hope because Jesus lived, and walked, and laughed, and still always lived out God's will. Jesus gives me hope because through Jesus we are now God's children – and like children, we have the room, space, and time to grow – to grow toward perfection in our walk of discipleship, our walk of light, our walk of love. Even as we grow, we still need to practice. Yo-yo Ma still practices, Simone Byles still practices. Both would say they are still learning – going on toward perfection- being refined/purified by hope.

And in case it all seems like too much, a never-ending journey, of never being enough, John writes to us these words of assurance, “My dear friends, now we are God's children, but it has not yet been revealed what we are to become in the future. We know that when it comes to light we will be like God, for we will see God as God really is.” (v. 2) John tells us that someday, since we are God's children, someday we will be like Jesus. It may not be in this lifetime, but because of Jesus we have a future where we will be perfected in the faith, we will hear, and sing and play that perfect music in love, we will run the perfect race in love, perform the perfect routine in love, say the perfect words of love, live out our existence in the perfection of God's love. Amen.