

“Behind The Curtain”

1 John 3:1-3

<http://bible.oremus.org/?q|=187344838>

It was just a curtain.

Just a curtain separated him from absolute power and pathetic weakness.

As long as he was behind the curtain, the world believed they were weak and he was strong.

The curtain kept everyone from seeing him as he really was.

But that all changed, when a little dog named Toto jumped out of Dorothy’s arms. And in one fateful moment, that feisty canine took the curtain in his tiny teeth, drew it back and exposed the great Wizard of Oz as he really was – a simple, bumbling man.

That’s the power of a simple curtain: curtains obscure the main attraction. They cover reality and block out light. They encourage darkness. They build suspense. They create mystery. Curtains keep us from seeing things as they really are.

You and I find ourselves behind curtains everyday. And I’m not talking about literal curtains that hang from our windows or are draped above a stage. I’m talking about curtains in a metaphorical sense. I’m talking about the way we see or don’t see the world around us.

When we turn on television or radio news we stand behind a curtain - a curtain bias that is. And that curtain of bias keeps us from the truth.

Advertisements pull a curtain over our eyes by telling us what we want to hear, and withholding other facts and figures which might affect our decision.

And other people draw the curtains in front of us by flattering us, lying to us, mocking us, insulting us or abusing us. Their words affect,

impact and influence self-perception to the point that it is safe to say that our self-esteem, the way that we see ourselves has been shaped by what people have said about us and whether or not we have believed what they said.

This is why 1 John 3:1-3 is such an important passage. “See,” the writer says, “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God and that is what we are.”

That is what we are. That is what you are. You are children of God. It’s a point that the writer of 1 John makes repeatedly throughout this letter. Thirteen times he mentions the word children, reminding his audience over and over that they are “children of God.” Sometimes, to drive the point home, he even refers to them as “little children.” This is who you are.

There’s a scene in “The Lion King,” where Simba, the young lion who has been living in exile for years, is wrestling with the call to return to the pride from which he fled.

The ghost of his dead father, Mufasa, visits him and tells Simba that he has forgotten him, “You have forgotten who you are and so have forgotten me....You are more than what you have become.”

“Remember who you are.” Mufasa’s ghost says, “You are my son, and the one true king. Remember...”

For some time now, Simba had been living behind a curtain, eating bugs, and singing “Hakuna Matata,” and because he had been living behind that curtain, he couldn’t see who he was – a child of the true king.

Who are you? Who are you really? We have names, and in some ways they are our most precious possessions. And sometimes there

are stories behind our names, some connection to our ancestry or a desired value. But we are more than our names.

Who are you really? The world has a way of identifying us. And often these identities determine our value to society.

You are young. You are old. You are rich. You are poor. You are pretty. You are ugly. You are employed. You are married. You are single. You are famous. You are average. You are a star. You are a failure. You are a success.

This is how the world categorizes and classifies us. They slap labels on us. And that makes it easier for them to understand us and it makes us easier to relate to.

But the problem is that if we believe what they say, and we identify ourselves as other people identify us, we begin to forget our true identity.

Max Lucado tells a story about small wooden people called Wemmicks. All Wemmicks were made by a woodcarver named Eli. Some Wemmicks were beautiful, radiant, talented and gifted. They were pretty, they could do tricks, jump over boxes, dance and other things. But others weren't so fortunate; they were chipped, broken, clumsy, misshapen and awkward.

If you were so blessed as to be one of the pretty and gifted ones, the other Wemmicks would put glittering star stickers on you. But if you were a dull and unattractive Wemmick; well, then you received a gray dot to let everyone know what kind of a Wemmick you were.

Puncinello, was a Wemmick who didn't get gold stars; he got gray dots. But one day he met someone special, someone unique and unusual. Her name was Lucia, and Lucia wasn't like the other Wemmick. Lucia didn't have gold stars or gray dots. Lucia was free of any sticker whatsoever. No gray dots. No gold stars.

Some Wemmicks admired Lucia, so they would give her a star sticker but it would just fall off. Other Wemmicks gave her a gray dot for not having any stickers at all, but they wouldn't stay on either.

Puncinello asked her about her sticker-free exterior. Lucia told him that she saw Eli the woodcarver everyday, and amazingly, Lucia said, the stickers began falling off – gold stars and gray dots – none of them stuck.

Puncinello thought about this and decided he would visit the Eli, the woodcarver, himself. And so with great trepidation he approached the house of the Eli. Eli had been expecting him; he had been waiting for Puncinello to come to him for some time now.

He told Puncinello that he was special. He told him that those stickers didn't matter. All Puncinello needed to remember was that he was created by Eli. And if Puncinello could remember that, the stickers would begin to fall off.

The writer of 1 John points out what Puncinello struggled to remember: that we are not what the world says we are. We do not derive our identity from the earthly tags, labels and names we receive. No, we are children of God who have been made by God.

In other words, we are "chips off the old block," we're in the spitting image of God. And the writer of 1 John points this out in his writings. He shows us that we reveal our identity as children of God by our actions, by our imitation of the one we serve.

We copy Jesus who took the form of a servant, who served others and loved others. We demonstrate whose children we are by obeying the commandments of Jesus who said we are to love God and love our neighbor.

We are children of God. And when we remember this, it should change our behavior, it changes our perspective of self and our perspective of others. Other labels don't seem

to matter, the curtain is drawn back and we see ourselves as we are.

The writer of 1 John points out that the world doesn't understand this because they don't know Jesus; they don't know our maker and the one whom we call father. That's why they might still try telling you who you are – but you are to remember that you are children.

Now, this doesn't mean that because we are children of God we will always act like children of God. This is the great struggle, and it's what 1 John tells us when we read:

“Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed.”

In other words, we are unfinished. That curtain is being pulled back and forth giving us glimpses of the kind of person we will be when we are brought to full completion in Christ.

There are sometimes we behave like demons and other times we can summon the resources of our “better nature” and act like angels.

Sometimes the curtain is open and our friends and family members see us as the children we were made to be and at other times the curtain is drawn shut and they can't even tell who they are looking at.

That's because who we are is not who we will be.

Brennan Manning is an author, speaker and former Catholic monk who has struggled with alcoholism all his life. And Brennan often says, “Aristotle says I am a rational animal. I say I am an angel with an incredible capacity for beer!”

We are angelic. We are children. But our hunger and thirst for earthly, “worldly” things still remain. Someday, those things that demand our attention, those petty, troubling things won't matter very much, but right now... they do. We still have excessive appetites, ugly attitudes, hurtful impulses and troubling tendencies.

We still say awful things to the ones we love. We still break promises. We still get angry. We still feel jealous. We still stab people in the back. We still talk behind their back. We are children, but we are spoiled, we are bratty, we are ornery, we are nasty, catty and defiant. Who we were made to be has yet to be seen; the full picture of what we will like has yet to be revealed.

And so, while we wrestle with the fact that we are unfinished children still hanging out behind the curtain, we have this hope that someday we will see ourselves as fully-formed children of God when we see God “as he really is.”

In other words, there will be a day when not only the curtain in front of **us** is pulled back, but the curtain in front of **God** is pulled back. On that great and glorious day, we will see ourselves and we will see God **as we really are**. Nothing will be in the way. The view will be unobstructed and we will be “like him.” There will be nothing to hide, nothing to be ashamed of. Everything will be out in the open.

We will see him as he is and we will see ourselves as we are.

As I said earlier, another great saint of our church family passed away this week. Clinton Click was “Paw-Paw” to his family and was Chilson Hills' grandfather. He was generous. He was kind. He was faithful. He was devoted.

At about 9:30 AM on November 4, 2011, He had been dead for a couple hours, lying under a blanket, on the hardwood floor of his living room. His long sleeved thermal undershirt had been cut in two and lay beneath his body. He was surrounded by his family and friends who wept openly and wondered out loud.

Kenneth, his oldest son, who had been in Ohio on a work assignment finally arrived and when he walked in the door, he walked straight to the closet and grabbed his dad's flannel shirt, the

one many of us have seen him wear over the years.

And then he took that shirt and walked over to his dad, laid that shirt on his dad's chest and wept great tears of loss.

"I just wanted to see him in his shirt. I just wanted to see him in his shirt."

He wanted to see him as he was because when he lay there, lifeless, the color fading from his face and the grayish pallor setting in, he needed to remember who his dad was; and it brought him hope.

Later, the children all gathered once again over at Borek Jennings funeral home to discuss the funeral service and final arrangements. And Kenneth came wearing his dad's shirt.

He was wearing Clinton, remembering his character and his values. He was remembering him in the purest and most meaningful of ways.

The Apostle Paul says that we are to "put on Jesus" to wear Jesus like a garment. He writes at another time that we are to "put on" the full armor of Christ, wearing faith, salvation, peace, truth, and right living.

And when we do this, we remember who we are, and we are encouraged by who we will be, excited by the fact that someday we will also see who God really is.

And, as 1 John 3:3 says, "...all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure."

We make ourselves look like God by imitating God's pure character.

Today, we remember our loved ones who are no longer with us. We remember them with tears which, as the psalmist says, are "precious" to God. But, the Apostle Paul tells us that we do not mourn as ones who have no hope. No, we mourn with the hope that we will one day see our loved ones as they are, as

they were made to be, as fully-formed children of God.

And on that day, the curtain will be drawn back, and we will see ourselves as we really are, as we were made to be. And, glory of glories, we will see something Moses himself could not see; we will see God as God really is.

And as we wait for that day, we put on Christ, like Clinton's flannel shirt and we purify ourselves, cleaning ourselves up, working diligently to live the life God has commanded us to live and the life Christ demonstrated for us.

In a world where life is fleeting, we, as Christians, are to remember the hope that lies behind the curtain.

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

For Sunday, November 6, 2011's Sermon

Foundational Scripture: 1 John 3:1-3

<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187344838>

Featured Scripture Reflection: “Beloved, 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.” – 1 John 3:2 <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187344865>

Opening Questions: Share about a time when you spotted a celebrity? Were you disappointed? Were you impressed? What do you think it means to be a “child of God?”

Scripture Questions

What is the scripture saying?

- Read **John 1:1-5, 10-13**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187344890> What stands out to you about this passage? What does this passage tell you about Jesus? What does this passage say about us (people)?
- Read **1 John 3:1-3**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187344918> What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this passage? What questions do you have?
- Read **Revelation 21:6-8**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=187344943> Think about what you’ve just read. How does it relate to the previous passages?

How is God speaking through Scripture?

- What is the “Good News” in these passages of Scripture?
- After discussing and pondering these passages, how do these passages affect me?

God’s word

- What is God’s invitation to you?

A prayer

Father, we thank you for calling us friends and for calling us your children. We wait for the day when everything is made clear to us. In the meantime, we will do our best to live pure, Christ-like lives. Amen.