

# IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend Anne H.K. Apple  
Sunday, November 1, 2020

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## **1 John 3:1-3**

See 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. 2 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. 3 And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

"I need to talk to you right now." That's what his text read at 7:30 am. He was a newlywed, and not an overly dramatic kind of guy. His wife had already left for work that morning when their home phone rang.

The voice on the other end of the line had grim news. His wife's father, young sixty-some years old, had dropped dead, unexpectedly. He was tasked with telling her, his bride.

After describing the details to me he said, "I don't know what to do. Will you help?"

Soon, with tears and lots of kleenexes, the church gathered in their living room. And as we came to pray, with the unexpected and heartbreaking news, we asked each person to come to prayer through two questions.

"What do you know?"

"What do you hope?"

1 John is one of three short epistles. It was written to an early Christian community that had been grounded in the gospel of John.

The author writes and reminds the people about their identity in Christ Jesus. When you are bound in Christ, you know about a light that shines in darkness; justice that rolls down like mighty waters and mercy that binds up the brokenhearted. Today I've asked two folks, two saints on earth, to help us to understand what it means to them to be called a child of God - to understand what it means to know Christ's love as a child of God, to have their identity completely connected to their faith.

Lauren Wellford Deming joins us from Portland, Oregon, where she lives with her husband, Will, and serves at a Presbyterian Retreat and Conference Center, Menucha. Later,

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Charlie McCrary, a saint who needs no introduction, partner to Janie, and an Idlewild elder, and beloved child of God will join us.

[Lauren's proclamation]

I trust that Lauren knows that peace she describes as an important part of her Christian identity shaped by a faith nurtured by the Saints in Heaven's Light and the Saints on Earth. And, I've learned much about hope from Lauren in the ways she has modeled caregiving in Christ's love.

In a column in the New York Times this week, David Brooks reflected on the necessity of doing difficult work - the hard work of working with people whose views we find completely objectionable. As children of God, we are called in our Christian identity into those hard places. There - the powerful impulse of Christ's love - known in light, justice, and mercy - is revealed.

As children of God, we are siblings, whether we like it or not. From one end of the world to another, from one end of a political spectrum to another, we are called children of God. And, we must stand in that identity.

“What do you know?”

“What do you hope?”

At Idlewild, we stand on the shoulders of the saints who have gone on before us. Saints who have done hard work together because of their identity in Christ Jesus.

From the earliest of days, the church knew, as I pray it does today, how hard it is, to point to the power of faith that shapes a people, and keeps them in a covenant, Christ-centered community. The power of faith in Christ brings people together as a new family full of hope and leads them to the right actions.

“Beloved”, the writer of 1 John says, “We are God's children now.”

Beloved is an address to those who know to whom they belong.

Beloved is a baptismal address.

It's God's thundering voice from heaven about Jesus.

This is MY Beloved with whom I am well pleased.

And it is Christ's language to each member of his body.

You are my beloved. You are my beloved.

Beloved, you are a family. You are my family.

Adult or an infant pulled through the waters of baptism, we hear the words, “See what love that God has given to us that we might be called children of God, and so we are.” Beloved Child of Blessing, Child of Promise - Welcome.

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We are - children of God.

When we contemplate the love of God - and how we have been created in God's likeness, that the profound love of God made us, and those whom we love - that is a love that is strong enough to keep us, have us to stand up, especially in the face of death and despair; chaos and uncertainty; brokenness and frailty.

"What do you know?"

"What do you hope?"

[Charlie with a word about being a child of God]

We are all children of God, we are related, whether we like it or not. And, together we stand in that identity.

That day when a young husband had to deliver hard news - about the death of a loved one - to his wife we came to prayer asking,

"What do you know?"

"What do you hope?"

And she began, "It's what I don't know. My dad wasn't sure about Jesus and the church was hard for him. He saw the hypocrisy and struggled with it - people who called themselves Christians but didn't act that way in the world. What I do know, is that you are here. What I hope," ... and she paused - and then named it. "What I hope is that my dad is okay with God, and in heaven. That's what I really hope."

Out of the silence, a voice responded, "God has your dad. Your dad is God's beloved. I know this to be true."

What we will be is yet to be revealed. As Corinthians reminds us, "For now we see dimly, but then, we shall know face to face." It's a strange life we lead, beloved ... believing in something we don't totally know about - that we can't see with any absolutism. And yet - we know when we sense peace, like Lauren; and we know what it means to love like Christ. We are called to live our lives out like saints on earth - in Christ's love, all of us, as siblings whose very lives shine light into darkness; who advocate for justice that rolls down like mighty waters and deliver mercy which binds up the brokenhearted.

We are all beloved, children of God.

"What do you know?"

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“What do you hope?”