

## A Child of God

On New Year's Day, I received this email from an adventure holiday company:

*'Dear Christine,*

*A new year, a new you, as the saying goes. But it's never that easy, is it? It starts with today's good intentions... come mid-January, resolutions are tested, and sometimes crumble. The solution?*

*It's time to **challenge yourself**. Break through the barriers and experience something new and amazing in 2016!' (Exodus New year letter)*

Now I'm not really keen on the idea of New Year resolutions, but the last sentence caught my attention: *'Break through the barriers and experience something new and amazing in 2016!'* I'd certainly like to do that!

This morning's readings talk about us being chosen, being given the right to become God's children. This is probably something we've heard many times before, but do we stop to appreciate just what an amazing truth this is? Do we believe that we can truly experience this kind of intimate relationship with such an almighty God?

*'Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. '* (John 1: 12-13[NIV])

Isn't that amazing!

Our part is the 'believing and receiving'. It's our decision to believe in Jesus and in his claims as to who he is and to receive him, a decision we may have made many years ago or more recently (or if not then maybe now's the time!).

But the right to become a child of God is a gift of love and grace from God. We heard in the verses from Ephesians: *'God had already decided that through Jesus Christ he would make us his sons – this was his pleasure and purpose'* (1:5[GNB]). So, this definitely doesn't happen because of anything we do to deserve it. This is purely God's work in us through Jesus. A gift of grace, his gift of new birth as God's children, according to his big plan for the world.

(If this concept of 'being chosen' seems to contradict the idea of us being free to choose to believe or not, then (maybe rather simplistically) I would suggest that God knows our thoughts, he knew them before we were even born! – and perhaps we're not really supposed to understand..)

So what difference does it make to be a child of God?

*'I am a child of God!'*

Listen to this account of how the realisation of that truth really transformed the life of its author:

*'That's it! That's it! I'm a son of God! It was like a flash of light. Something I had been searching for had suddenly been discovered. I am a son of God!...*

*.. I had always been taught to be highly suspicious of 'experience' and 'subjective Christianity'. God was often portrayed to be great but remote; to be believed in, to be worshipped, but definitely not to be experienced in a personal way. What mattered above everything else was objective truth; that we believed in God's existence and his love.*

*Now something was happening to me that could only be described as 'experience'. I felt different. I was different. I was bubbling over with joy...*

*....Jesus Christ died for me, that was a truth I had known from childhood. I had not appreciated that when he died, I died with him. My old sinful nature had been put to death on the cross. I had been crucified with Christ and I had never realised it..... now I was set free to share a new risen life with Jesus. I was a son of God, filled with the Holy Spirit.' (Colin Urquhart (1974), When the Spirit Comes)*

I read this because I think that it's easy to be sceptical about spiritual 'feelings' and 'experiences' but if we really are God's children then we *are* different. We have been born '*not as the children of a human father, but with God himself as our father*' (John 1:13[GNB]) and being born again in this way is a transformative experience of dying to our old nature and being given a new one. When we commit our lives to Jesus, we are born into a new spiritual family, by the work of God's Spirit, bringing us new life, giving us a new start. This new birth is based on our relationship with Jesus, not anything we have done.

How does this happen?

Paul, in his letter to the Romans (8:16) says that '*God's spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children*'.

And if we are joined to God in this way, as his children then we can be totally secure in the love of God our Father, free from fear, (not a 'slave to fear' as Paul puts it).

So if we are feeling discouraged, maybe overwhelmed by what we feel God wants us to do, then it's a great encouragement to remember: 'I am a child of God '. Wouldn't it be great to come into a new and amazing experience of this truth in 2016?

A few weeks ago I heard a song which really inspired me. The chorus keeps humming around in my head and has been a great comfort to me, just to sing to myself when I'm struggling to be positive about life or feeling apprehensive about doing something. The chorus goes: '*I'm no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God*'. This great thought keeps me going when I feel incapable, unable to cope. It makes me feel loved when I feel like there's no one there. It's certainly an amazing reassurance which I would like to know more of!

*'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight..... to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.'* (Eph 1:3-4 [NIV])

Yes, God has blessed us in a big way, and continues to do so. But it must not be just about indulgent wallowing in blessing. We heard in the Gospel reading that Jesus brought grace *and* truth: the blessings given by grace *and* the truth of receiving Jesus and living as one of his followers. So real blessing will result in action: obedience, ministry and service. The knowledge and experience of being a child of God will energise us into action! We are God's children, filled with the Holy Spirit, and he is transforming us into his likeness, with the character of his son, Jesus.

Just think, how will this truth affect what we do in our everyday lives?

We should expect to see the characteristics of Jesus, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, in the ways we interact together and with others – can we remember them? Love, joy, peace.....

Let's think, how do these characteristics show in the practical things we do?

Within our church communities I see lots of practical love and care being given to people (visiting, lifts, sharing skills/belongings, meals, prayer...

Also as we think of God's family around the world it is good that as a church we are able to show God's love by supporting projects such as Global Care and the Olive Tree planting in the Middle East with financial help and prayer.

But it's not just in our church family. We need to remember that as children of God, we can show his characteristics in our workplaces, schools, homes and places we socialise. Maybe, for example, being patient with someone who's being really annoying, or showing kindness to someone who's being unpleasant to us, going out of our way to help someone who isn't expecting it.

We are children of God – as God's children, as we go about our lives, what do others see in us as we reach out to them?

Do they see something they want to share in, do they see a child of God, demonstrating the characteristics of his son?

Sounds like rather a tall order.... but we have the Holy Spirit!

So come on! Let's *'Break through the barriers and experience something new and amazing in 2016!'*