

3:1 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.

3:2 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.

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

1 John 3:1-3 NRSV

Are you better off today than you were four years ago? Well, I suppose this is a valid question for a politician to ask, because it's a question that gets to the root of the matter: Should I stay or should I go?!? And this is their pitch, the hard sell. Let's make the constituents put up or shut up; "Come on, can you really tell me I haven't been good for your interests?" "Don't you want a sunroof to go with that sedan, or at least an extended warranty?!?"

This question also allows the citizen to put up a forcefield, to make a decision in a vacuum, to make their own welfare the central factor in their show of support. This question has the potential to eliminate trivial decision-making factors like stage presence, or likability, and to prioritize a general platform over its individual planks. That is, to vote for the forest and not the tree. Other times, though, this question can have a more negative quality: it can free (or burden depending on which side of the coin you see) individuals to prioritize their desire for economic, political and social gain, over and above their desire for trust, or for policies that align with their core values. The ends justify the means.

Fear not. I am not here to answer this question for you. I'm not here to tell you who to vote for. And I'm certainly not here to chastise anyone for exercising their own conscience in the selection of our leaders.

But, but, but...I don't live in a vacuum, and neither do you. Part of my calling is to read our sacred scripture in my current context, and offer a reflection on how this

ancient story can inform actions and choices that reflect the call of our benevolent Creator in today's world.

In light of God's calling, and in light of a polarizing election, I was struck by a verse in today's reading: "The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him." (1 John 3:1 NRSV).

The world does not recognize our value as children of God, because its systems have prevented it from seeing Lady Wisdom at the City Gate, and understanding Jesus' fulfilment of law, and a embracing a thousand other manifestations of God's divine presence in our midst.

The world does not know God's children, because the world does not know God.

Here, in this place, Sardis Baptist Church, part of the world, but certainly not the whole world, we subscribe to the notion that God is indeed very present, very real, and very known. God is our source. And the energy of that source is love. We exist in this affectionate energy by 1) loving God – that is recognizing, honoring and praising our source in such a way as to make our lives representative of that source and 2) loving neighbor – that is acknowledging, seeing, and celebrating in others the same divine spark God gives each of us. We love God and we love neighbors as we love ourselves. We is our pronoun – a subject: plural, non-gendered, including a whole audience. E-V-E-R-Y B-O-D-Y!!! Our value as children of God is rooted in our connectedness to God, neighbor, and creation.

I'm making my point, I promise. We live in a world that wants to connect everything back to a central theme: are you, You, a, singular pronoun, better off because of something? And I emphasize thing: stuff, materials derived from finite sources.

Is your vote, or your purchase, or your relationship, or your activity, or your lifestyle going to do something for you, and for your benefit?!?

Friends, the world ain't ever gonna know God's children, if it keeps insisting on singular pronouns.

Friends, the world ain't ever gonna know God's children, if it keeps insisting that fulfilment is separate from community.

Friends, the world ain't ever gonna know God's children, if it keeps insisting on finding contentedness in finite sources.

So no, I'm not gonna answer the question for you, "Are you better off today than you were four years ago.?" I'm not gonna ask you that question, and I'm not gonna answer it, because it's precisely the kind of questions that prevents us from seeing the presence of God, and more importantly prevents us from seeing all of God's beloved.

Instead I'm gonna challenge you to consider what might make us – we, the children of God – that's you, and me, and all of creation – better off today? Because God, and God's beloved need to be seen, and heard, and experienced, and loved for God's world to be God's world.

How do we make our beloved community better?

We've got be children of God – those who love God, and love neighbor, and love creation.

I think that means that we cannot prioritize our convenience, our comfort, our pocketbooks, our varied privileges, over and above the needs of our neighbors.

I think that means that we work for a world where we do not allow social constructions to blind us from seeing God's uniqueness in our neighbors.

I think that means we seek the generosity of God's flame, a source which is never weakened by sharing its light, over and above the finite cup of Caesar.

But more than anything, I think this means being children of God more than once every four years. Yes, by all means, consider the whole of God's creation in your vote this week, but don't let that be the only place you do so. Living as children of God means seeking to love God, neighbor, and creation in EVERY action of our lives. Imagine the collective power of intentionality: what if every conversation,

every purchase, every decision, every relationship, every of action of our day was informed by its impact on God's world?

I dare say, such intentionality would leave us a lot less beholden to the results of elections. And I dare say a whole lot more of God's children would be seen and known and loved in this world.

This morning, we honor, we remember, we seek to imitate the saints, both living and passed, who have made God's children known, by seeing them and loving them. They did so, because, they, like the Good Samaritan, gave as much thought to God's call, and their neighbors' needs, as they did to their own wellbeing.

And we, friends, are better because of them, better because of how they have made God known to us. May we, the church at Sardis, follow their example, and be a people who make God's children seen, and known, and loved in God's world.

May it be so, and may it be soon! Amen.