

Fred Craddock was one of the great preachers of the last century. While lecturing at Yale, he told of a short vacation he and his wife had taken to Gatlinburg, Tennessee. One night they found a quiet little restaurant where they looked forward to a quiet meal – just the two of them.

While they were waiting for their meal, they noticed a distinguished, white-haired man moving from table to table, speaking with all the guests. Craddock whispered to his wife, “I hope he doesn’t come over here.” He didn’t want the man to intrude on their privacy. But the man did come by their table.

“Where you folks from?” he asked amicably.

“Oklahoma,” Craddock replied.

“Splendid state, I hear, although I’ve never been there,” said the white-haired man. “What do you do for a living?”

“I teach homiletics at the graduate seminary of Phillips University,” Craddock answered.

“Oh, so you teach preachers, do you? Well, I’ve got a story I want to tell you.” And with that, he pulled up a chair and sat down at the table with Craddock and his wife.

Dr. Craddock said he groaned inwardly. Oh no, here comes another preacher story. It seems everyone has one.

The man stuck out his hand. “I’m Ben Hooper. I was born not far from here across the mountains. My mother wasn’t married when I was born so I had a hard time. When I started to school, my classmates had a name for me, and it wasn’t a nice name. I used to go off by myself at recess and during lunchtime because the taunts of my classmates cut so deeply.

“What was worse was going downtown on Saturday afternoon and feeling every eye burning a hole through me. They were all wondering just who my father was.

“When I was about 12 years-old, a new preacher came to our church. I would always go in late and slip out early. But one day the preacher said the benediction so fast I got caught and had to walk out with the crowd. I could feel every eye in church on me. Just about the time I got to the door I felt a big hand on my shoulder. I looked up and the preacher was looking at me.

“Who are you, son? Whose boy are you?” the preacher asked.

“I felt the old weight come down on me. It was like a big, black cloud. Even the preacher was putting me down.

“But as he looked down at me, studying my face, he began to smile a big smile of recognition.

“‘Wait a minute,’ he said, ‘I know who you are. I see the family resemblance. You are a son of God.’

“With that he slapped me on the shoulder and said, ‘Boy, you’ve got a great inheritance. Go and claim it.’”

The old man looked across the table at Fred Craddock and said, "That was the most important single sentence ever said to me." With that he smiled, shook the hands of Craddock and his wife, and moved on to another table to greet the folks.

Suddenly, Fred Craddock remembered. On 2 occasions, the people of Tennessee had elected the son of an unwed mother to be their governor. His name was Ben Hooper.

I know who you are. I see the family resemblance. You are a son or daughter of God. Terrible things happen to people when they forget who they are. Some of them forget their values. Some of them lose their sense of purpose. All of them lose their joy.

Today is All Saints' Day. We remember those people who have gone before us who sought in their own time to live as children of God. They were not perfect people – though they have been made perfect now. Notice how 1st John writes: Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. But we know that when it is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Saints of God are not perfect people in this world – though they will be made perfect when they come face to face with Christ. This is the inheritance that we have been promised.

Why is this true? For only one reason: because we are God's children. No exceptions. Ever. And nothing we can ever do – or fail to do – can change that. We are children of God. BELOVED children of God.

A very exclusive auction was held several decades ago. The money bid for the objects which were auctioned was far higher than you would have paid in an ultra-nice, very expensive department store. For example, the winning bid for a rocking chair that had been valued between \$3000 and \$5000 was \$453,500.00. It was true throughout the entire auction. A used automobile valued between \$18,000 and \$22,000 was sold for \$79,000. A set of green tumblers valued at \$500 sold for \$38,000. A necklace valued at \$500 to \$700 went for \$211,500. For 4 days, articles of common, ordinary value were sold for wildly inflated prices. Why? The items auctioned were from the estate of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. The value of the items auctioned sold on the basis of the one to whom they had belonged.

Why are you and I valuable? Because of the ONE to whom we belong.

You and I may well look very ordinary to those around us – but God sees us as having ultimate value. Enough value that God gave His Son on our behalf.

Don't let anyone tell you that you don't matter. Don't let anyone rob you of your identity. YOU ARE A SON OR DAUGHTER OF GOD! YOU ARE WORTH THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST SHED ON THE CROSS!

"See what love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" Always. Forever. Amen. (adapted from King Duncan, DYNAMIC PREACHING, Oct-Dec 2017, p. 31-33)