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## *Find a Childhood Photograph*

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**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam G. Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**Third Sunday of Easter**

"Beloved, we are God's children *now* ,  
What we will be has not been revealed."  
(1 John 3:2)

At my house, on the kitchen wall, we have hung dozens of photographs. Our wall is not that big, but almost every inch of it is covered with framed photographs, from the ceiling down to about the four foot level. They are not hung evenly. They are haphazard and fun.

Our family calls this the Strong Wall. It has images of our family's past, at various ages, including some of our friends, though not all of our friends. And it is strong.

In one of those photographs, I see a small boy, maybe six years old, sitting on a fence in my friend's backyard, with three other similar boys, all sitting on the fence with our little arms looped over each other's shoulders. We are in Newnan, Georgia. None of us has a shirt on, and I remember that we were all wearing our favorite short pants - five pocket pants, we called them, because they could hold so much more than regular four-pocket pants. I can remember the tennis shoes we wore in those days, too. We knew that if we wore the right shoes, we could be the fastest boys around.

I am one of those four boys, of course, and I look very little today like I did then. I gaze at that photo, and I wonder. I actually remember much of what I was thinking about in those days. But I had no idea, in those days, what I would be. What I would be had not yet been revealed.

"Beloved, we are God's children now. , What we will be has not been revealed."

That is what we have read today, from the First Epistle of John, that wise and beloved disciple. We do not know exactly the hand that wrote this little letter toward the very end of the New Testament. I like to think it came from a community, a community of a beloved disciple.

"See what love the Father has given us," he said, "that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are , Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed."

Children. We are God's children.

There are lots of ways to define what a child is. Innocent. Naïve. Undeveloped. Fresh. Beautiful. Curious. Add your own favorite description. But, today, if I were define "childhood," I would use the words of beloved First John. As a child, I had no idea what I would be. What I would be had not yet been revealed. Children have no idea what will appear.

I doubt if any of us knew exactly what we would grow up to be—even if some of us did have a goal, or even a vision, of what we wanted to be. Maybe we wanted to be an athlete, or a musician. Maybe we wanted to be a scientist, or a lawyer, or a family man. But when the time came that we actually achieved that goal, arrived at that destination, what happened? It still does not feel exactly the same way we imagined it, does it?

Indeed, even now, I doubt if any of us knows now exactly what we will be when we grow up. Even today, we are still children, no matter how old we are.

Some of us took on Lenten disciplines this year. We gave up something for Lent, or we assigned ourselves some new task, or some new discipline that might bring us closer to God. I hope those disciplines were helpful.

What if we were to take on an Easter discipline? After all, Easter should be a far more powerful season than Lent. What are you doing for *Easter*? Have you given anything up? Have you taken something wonderful on?

Here is my suggestion for an Easter discipline. Go find a photograph of yourself when you were young. When you were a child. If Easter Day means celebrating our being born again, then, today, the Third Sunday of Easter, we are all children again.

"Beloved, we are God's children now. , What we will be has not yet been revealed."

Take some time to reflect on that photograph. Consider what your life was like at that time. What were you wondering about? What did you think would happen in your life? Then, consider what has actually been revealed.

Easter is like that glorious unknown, that glorious revelation. What God has for you at Easter is just as unimaginable and glorious as your coming of age. We have no idea what awaits us in this resurrection life. We are coming alive!

When I was a child, like many of my friends, my favorite lunch was a peanut butter and honey sandwich, especially if it had been wrapped up for a while in a bag, enough time so that the honey had soaked into the bread and crystalized a bit.

I could not imagine that one day, I might actually like tomatoes. But I remember that day so clearly, the day I decided to give in to my mother and actually try a tomato. I could not believe how beautiful it tasted. Indeed, I had had no idea how delicious that taste would be.

As children, we have no idea. We are fresh and new born. Even the idea of our further lives is beyond us.

Beloved, we are God's children now. We are part of an Easter community, an Easter family. And it takes time to grow in this family. We gaze at faces in church. We hear scriptural stories. We play and laugh; we cry and fight with each other. Ultimately, we grow with each other.

In order to grow, we eat together every Sunday. We eat at the Lord's table. It's only a taste of new wine and living bread that we get together, but it tastes new and delicious every Sunday.

And we tell stories to each other. That is part of growing up. A *child* receives. But the *adult* gives. The more we grow up, the more we give.

"It does not yet appear what we will be." But if we learn to give, learn to give food to each other, and learn to tell the stories again to new people, learn to give the stories, then the revelation gradually appears. We are growing into Christ.

When we learn to give, we are growing into Christ.

In one of my former churches, the church where I developed so carefully my ideas on how to celebrate the Easter Vigil, we used to begin the early Easter service with the altar looking exactly like we left it on Good Friday. Empty and dark. Like our own Cathedral church is dark when we begin at 6 a.m. on Easter Sunday.

But, in my older days, during the first early morning service of Easter Day, when we gradually brought light into the space, we did not vest or decorate the altar until the offertory. (Surely you know what the offertory is, when people usually offer their gifts of pledges of money? Please don't forget that!)

Well, in that parish, on Easter Sunday, early, we arranged for the children of the congregation to slip away during the offertory-while the high altar was dark and bare. The children went downstairs, to where we had stored hundreds of Easter lilies. And when the offertory procession began, the children led the procession, each one of them carrying an Easter lily. The Flower Guild was waiting at the altar, and, gradually, every lily was offered at the altar, quickly arranged; and then they fabulously adorned the altar for the first Easter Eucharist.

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But if we carry enough lilies into church, it *will* be revealed. If we eat enough at the Lord's table, it *will* be revealed. If we learn the stories so well that we can give them to others. Well, then, it *will* gradually appear.

The Body of Christ. We are becoming the Body of Christ. Yes, we have some wounds, but we have been healed. Yes, some parts of us have died; but we have been reborn.

Take a photograph of this church community today. Look around. Take a picture. Beloved, we are the children of God. We are the Body of Christ.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
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