

**A sermon by the Rev. Dr. John Judson  
First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Michigan  
Disability Inclusion Sunday**

**Psalm 8**

To the leader: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.  
O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouths of babes and infants  
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honour.  
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,  
all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

**1 John 3:1-13**

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

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the

devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you.

They were all very excited. It was the day when all of the Junior High students visited their new high school. All of us guys were in the gym on the bleachers waiting for the coaches to come and tell us about how we could be part of their teams. What everyone in the bleachers understood however was that there was really only one coach that we were all waiting for; the baseball coach. We were waiting for coach Knoblauch. We were waiting for him because he was the winner. He had multiple district, regional and even state championships. Ultimately several of his players would play in the majors. Finally he came in the room, scanned the bleachers and said something like, "I know many of you want to play for me. But unless you have played baseball every year since you were seven, played in the majors and were an all-star I do not even want you on my field. You are not good enough to play Bellaire baseball." You could almost hear the air being sucked out of the room. For many of the boys there it was as if life was over. This is what I have since come to refer to as a "bleacher moment."

Sooner or later most of us have bleacher moments when we realize that the myth of unlimited potential is just that...a myth. We are raised in a culture that tells us that we have unlimited potential; that if we work hard enough, and long enough we can be anything we want and accomplish anything that we want. Anybody, the saying goes, can grow up to be president. But this is myth. Just ask Newt Gingrich or Rick Santorum or all of those guys whose names we have forgotten because they did not become president. No, along the way most of us have bleacher moments. We realize that our unlimited potential is in fact limited. Though a blessed few make it to the highest level of achievement in their fields, sooner or later they too discover that they become a bit slower, a bit less able, have less energy and so their bleacher moment comes later, rather than sooner.

But there are also those whose bleacher moment comes much earlier. It comes at birth with words like, Downs Syndrome or medically fragile. It comes in the first few years with words like Autism or dyslexia. And with those words parents, grandparents and friends begin to wonder...what now? What do we do now that the bleacher moment has already arrived?

There are many different ways to answer that question; therapy, tutoring, great patience; but there is one more answer to "what now" that I would like us to consider. That is that we turn to the short piece out of First John that we read this morning, where we discover that in God's economy all children, teens and adults still have unlimited potential to live into the fullness of being Christ-like people. This begins with John telling us that we are children of God. We are God's children because, as John writes in verse 9, the seed of God is within us. This seed is a reminder that it is God who created each of us. This relationship gives us intrinsic value; meaning that we are not defined by our ability to dribble a basketball, or do differential equations, or anything else that we might learn or practice. The very fact that we are created by God gives us not only inherent value but opens us to the potential to become fully Christ-like.

The second way we see this unlimited potential is when John tells us that we have an open future. John writes, "We are God's children now, what we will be has not yet been revealed." So often, as with the boys on those bleachers, we think that when our bleacher moment arrives that life is over; there is nothing more ahead. What John tells us is that this is not so...what we will be has not yet been revealed. As many of you may or may not know, my wife Cindy was the principal of an elementary school which was the cluster school in her for all children with disabilities. One year a woman arrived with her son Ezra. They had moved from a different district where the mother had been told that Ezra, who had autism, did not speak and simply lay in a corner and screamed, had no future. This was all he would be. Cindy was a believer that what we will be has not yet been revealed. In fifth grade Ezra was not only part of a regular class but one day when he was next to Cindy waiting for the buses to arrive, he saw a child crying, hit Cindy on the leg and said, "That boy having a bad day." Speech, empathy...a future was still being written because the seed of God is within Ezra and within us.

The final way in which John reminds us of our unlimited potential in becoming Christ-like people is that God has a plan for remaking each of us. "What we do know is this, when Christ is revealed, we will be like him

because we will see him as he is." The vision that scripture offers is that one day there will come a time when no one has a bleacher moment; when each and every one of us is renewed and made whole so that we can discover the fullness of who we were created to be. We will be made into human beings whose lives completely reflect the love and grace of God at every turn. As the Book of Revelation puts it, God is making all things new. God is renewing the face of the earth and everyone in it. In other words the seed of God will come to full bloom within us.

It is for these reasons that we at First Presbyterian Church have an All Abilities Inclusion Ministry. We believe that every child, teen and adult are children of God, with the seed of God within them, that we are to be part of helping their futures unfold and that God has something amazing in store for them. We are to be co-workers with God in helping every person discover the love that God has for them and to discover the potential God has placed in front of them. We invite you then to be a part of this process; to help teach our children and teens; to be a mentor or partner in our AAIM ministry; to join us not only at our monthly Rejoicing Spirit's worship service or our special service this week for the Angel's Place homes. The challenge before us is to not simply believe what John tells us, but to live into it. So here is my challenge for the week, to ask yourselves, "How am I helping to make Everybody's Church a place in which all children, teens and adults get to discover their unlimited potential to be a Christ-like child of God."

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