

TEXT: 1 John 3:1-7  
THEME: We are children of God  
SUBJECT: Identity  
TITLE: “The Color of Me”

Third Sunday of Easter  
18 April 2021  
Messiah Moravian  
Jerry Harris

I like fountain pens. In an age when two opposable thumbs tap out texts on glass screens, I prefer the feel of a fine fountain pen flowing across classic archival quality paper. Not that what I have to say warrants space in any archive, but the physicality of ink inscribing thoughts on premium 24 pound ivory colored paper is therapeutic.

My collection of fountain pens began several decades ago with the purchase of a Bordeaux Mont Blanc, medium nib. It “ended” (I almost bought a new model last week, on sale of course) with the purchase of two Sailor fountain pens from Japan.

Between the Mont Blanc and the Sailors came another Mont Blanc (the Chopin edition), a couple of Pelikans, a Conklin the color of a sunrise at Wrightsville Beach, and a Waterford Kilbarry Guilloche Emerald Isle. The weight and feel of this “Irish” beauty gives substance to thoughts engraved on the page. It is a gracious pen.

As your pen collection grows—I have about eight—so does your interest in inks: Royal Blue for the Pelican, Mystery Black for the Mont Blanc, Apache for the Conklin, Brilliant Green for the Emerald Isle, fuyu-gaki and murasaki-shikibu for the Sailors, and one which has, as of now, no pen to fill—Tropical Glow.

This ink promises to take your handwriting to a new level of sophistication, which is probably why the bottle remains unopened. I don’t have a pen equal to that promise. Tropical Glow is infused with silver colored particles and dries to reveal a twinkling, pearlescent effect that makes your words smile. Simply Shakespearean!

A while back I purchased the “ink of the year”: Edelstein’s Smokey Quartz. I filled my Brown Marble Pelikan with Smokey Quartz and put pen to paper: brown! Apparently Smokey Quartz is the new name for brown. Brown is so UPS. If it was named “Brown,” I probably would not have bought it. But Smokey Quarts, I’m all in.

By now you will have noticed the producers of fountain pen ink—amazing there is still sufficient demand for such an antiquated thing to be a profitable enterprise—also manufacture adjectives: *Royal Blue*, *Mystery Black*, *Brilliant Green* (Who doesn’t want to be blinded by green?), *Smokey Quartz*. You may wonder, along with Juliet, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” To which I reply, “If it is brown call it brown.”

The author of 1 John knows what I am talking about: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be *called* children of God; and that is *what we are*.” We are called children of God because we are children not orphans.

Calling a thing what it is matters. If I ask you to pass the ketchup, I don’t expect to get mustard even if I prefer mustard. But who we are and what we call one another matters a whole lot more.

Black. White. Brown. Yellow. Red. African. European. Latinx. Asian. Indigenous. The recent rise in hates crimes against Asian Americans in this country is the latest evidence of why what we call one another matters, why it can be a matter of life and death.

The Sesame Street song “The Color of Me” knows it matters. “Some skin is dark. Some skin is light. Some skin is brown. Some skin is white. Different colors. Different shades. It’s part of being human. It’s how we’re made.” Disastrously, we have denied the humanity of those whose shade of skin color was darker than ours.

Greg Pardlo, an American poet, writer and professor at Rutgers University, won the Pulitzer for poetry in 2015. Greg was invited to give a reading in Madrid, Spain. An Englishman collected Greg and his host, a fellow poet, to take them to the event. The Englishman looked at Greg and said, “You look so much darker than in your pictures.” The remark, Greg’s host observed, was like a razor slice.

The reading took place at the famous Instituto Internacional. Another man, white and middle-aged, this time an American expat, said to Greg, “You look like a German tourist with your shorts on, except for your skin color.” These white men, the host observed, lived in a world that hardly ever questioned their skin color.

Later, the host asked Greg, “Did that bother you?” He said, “I’m so used to that. I didn’t take it personally. I was recently in Little Rock, Arkansas, for a reading to celebrate my work, and on my way home someone shouted from a car: ‘Go home you goddamn nigger.’”

What’s in a name? Fear. Hatred. Racism. Death. “In every insult, rift and war where color, scorn or wealth divide, Christ suffers still . . .” says the hymn writer Brian Wren.

We are called children of God and that is what we are, John says, *because* of the Father’s love. He goes on to say what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we know is this: when Christ is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. If we hold this hope, we need to purify ourselves, just as he is pure.

In the words of the poet, Wendell Berry:  
    Whatever is foreseen in joy  
    Must be lived out from day to day.  
    Vision held open in the dark  
    By our ten thousand days of work.

John follows this talk of hope with talk of sin. To understand why, we need to know what sin is. Sin is not only a refusal to “do” this or that thing willed by God, or a determination to do what God forbids. Sin is more radically a refusal *to be what we are*, a rejection of our mysterious, contingent, spiritual reality hidden in the very mystery of God. (Thomas Merton)

Sin is also our refusal to allow others to be who they are—children of God, images of God. We cannot be who we were created to be while at the same time rejecting the mysterious, contingent, spiritual reality hidden in the very mystery of God of Africans, Latinx, Asians, or Indigenous

peoples. Denying their humanity is—let’s call it what it is—sin. Discrimination based on the color of one’s skin is sin. Racism is sin.

When Christ is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is: the friend of all peoples. To see him as the friend of all peoples, to know him as our friend, we must purify ourselves by loving as he loves: indiscriminately.

PRAYER: Franz Wright, “After Absence”

God’s words translated into human words  
are spoken and shine  
on a few upturned faces.

There is nothing else like this.

I will tell you what no eye has seen  
and teach you to see  
what no ear has heard—

Father

*Forgive me  
the harm I have done*

*Those who have harmed me  
forgive . . .*

They say what we are going to be  
will not become clear  
until he appears

and when this happens  
we will become like him  
for we will see him as he is.

God is love  
they say,  
in human words.