

## 1 John 3:1-7

Next month will be the 32nd anniversary of the eruption of Mt. St. Helen's in the State of Washington. It had been a dormant volcano for 100 years, but the hot magma within it finally caused it to explode. Volcanoes are typically listed either as active or as dormant. One of the most active volcanoes in the world is Mt. Vesuvius in Italy. It has erupted several times, the most devastating taking place in A.D. 79, back when St. John who wrote our text for today, was preaching and teaching as one of Jesus' Apostles.

There is a connection between the words that the Apostle John wrote for us and the activity, or non-activity, of volcanoes. Listen to St. John: *"Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness...no one who abides in (Christ) keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or knows Him."* And just after our text in verses 8 and 9 he writes: *"Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil...no one born of God makes a practice of sinning."*

We all know people who make a practice of sinning. They despise the Law of God and willfully, without remorse, let the Old Adam within their flesh have his way. They say whatever they want, cussing at their neighbors and despising the name of God. They do whatever they want, despising authority, despising the church and the gathering of God's people for worship, living sexually immoral lives without regret, being more familiar with the label on a bottle of beer than with the pages of the Bible.

Such people are active volcanoes. The Old Adam in them erupts again and again. Their wickedness spews out of them like hot lava exploding from a volcano. Just as an active volcano makes a practice of erupting, so there are people who make a practice of sinning. These people are not of God but are of the devil. St. John says so. They may know of Jesus, but they do not know Him. They may have been Christians at one time in their life, but no longer do they abide in Christ.

When a volcano erupts it does two things. It affects itself, and it affects whatever is around it. When Mt. St. Helen's blew, it took on a whole new shape. It buried itself in hot lava and volcanic ash. And everything around it died. Many people and animals fled before it erupted. Still, 58 people were killed, and there was property damage estimated at \$1.2 billion. When Vesuvius erupted in 79, it destroyed the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. And when Mt. Krakatoa erupted in Indonesia in 1883, it created a tidal wave which killed 36,000 people.

Like such volcanoes, people who make a practice of sinning destroy both themselves and those around them. They bury themselves with their sins. They become mountains of dead ashes. Like with St. Helen's, many people flee from them. They avoid them if they can. Still, their sinful ways manage to hurt others. Those within their own family. Those who live near them. Those who become victims of their wickedness. It is unwise to remain near an active volcano. It is also unwise to associate with those who make a practice of sinning.

We should not, however, become Pharisees and think that we are better than such people. We may not be active volcanoes, but you and I are volcanoes nonetheless. We may not cuss out our neighbors. We may honor authority. We may honor God by being faithful in worship. And we may not be living in sexual sin. But understand this...the same hot magma found within active volcanoes is found also within dormant ones. You may not be an active volcano, but the very same wicked Old Adam which lives in those who make a practice of sinning lives also within you and me. So we are dormant volcanoes. We are not out erupting in wickedness day after day. We do not make a practice of

sinning. But you and I need to repent just as the openly wicked need to. Others may not see hot lava spewing out from our mouth, but that hot lava does live in our hearts nonetheless.

It is by the grace of God that you and I are not active volcanoes. It is not because of anything within us of which we can boast. Listen again to St. John: *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God, and so we are.”* God gave His love to you in your baptism. There in the water His grace came to you. There you were *“born of God.”* There you began to abide in Christ, and Christ in you. The reason why the Old Adam in you does not have his way with you is because of the Risen Lord Jesus who abides within you. He keeps the hot magma from erupting out of you as it does in those who practice sinning. Jesus overcomes the Old Adam in you so that you do not become buried in your sins and destroy others in the process.

Jesus knows something about sin and those who practice it. They spewed out wicked words upon Him when He stood before Pontius Pilate. They covered Him with their hot, burning lies, and then they nailed Him to a cross where He endured the burning lava of hell for you. Jesus went through all of this so that now, in Him, God calls you His children.

Now there are days when we become like a Mt. St. Helen’s-- when the Old Adam in us takes over and we act more like the wicked than like God’s children. Listen again to these comforting words: *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God, and so we are.”* You are God’s child because He calls you His child. When Adam named the animals in the Garden, whatever he named an animal, that was its name. If Adam called an animal what it was, how much more does God call you who you are. What God has named, He has named. This is why John writes, *“See...that we should be called children of God...and so we are!”* Not, “so we can be.” Not, “if we live up to it, we’ll be called His children.” *“And so we are.”* Period!

Yes, there is hot magma living in your heart, just as in mine. And there are times when it erupts. But God keeps calling you back to Himself. He keeps giving you a heart full of repentance. He keeps giving you Jesus. And He keeps calling you His child. God does not love you because you are a dormant volcano. His love for you makes you who you are. And His forgiveness for you is real, is yours now, and is greater than any sin in your heart--greater than any sin you have done in your life.

Now because you are God’s children you will not walk through that door later and make a practice of sinning this week. We carry sin with us in our flesh, and because we are weak we commit sin, though we do not want to. But you, as God’s children, also carry Christ with you. The same Christ who died to forgive your sins. The same Christ who will help you live this week as children born, not of the devil who make a practice of sinning, but as children born of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.