

# CHILDREN OF GOD

1 John 3:1-3

All Saints' Day

November 3, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The epistle lesson for All Saints' comes from *The First Letter of John*, chapter 3, verses 1 through 3. It's short and sweet. And by "sweet," I mean that it is really, really sweet. John points us to the incredibly gracious and glorious hope we have for the future. Please stand as you are able for God's holy Word. From 1 John 3, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Every saint of God shares this hope. And so, one of the things we do on All Saints' Day is remember those saints of God who have fallen asleep in Jesus Christ. We thank God for the gift they were to us in this world. And we especially thank God that those who die in Christ are never really dead, because they are alive in Christ now, and their bodies will be raised and transformed when he appears. We remember all the saints of God, including those from the past that we never knew, family or friends for whom we still grieve their absence, and all those from this congregation. Among members and friends from Trinity who fell asleep in the last year, we remember Paul Lofthus, Norma Petsinger, Ruth Tweed, Eugene Nielsen, and Joyce Spilde. Many of you think of other family and friends who died. And it doesn't have to be from the past year. Some losses are felt for years, or even our entire lives. And so, for all who have died in Christ, we thank God for their lives. We thank him that he made them to be his children through Jesus Christ, that he redeemed them through Jesus' blood, that he granted them a blessed end, and that he will reunite us in the resurrection as his beloved children.

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Dear saints, you are children of God,

You are both of these things. You are saints, and you are children of God. These are two ways of talking about the same thing. God has claimed you as his own. He calls you his own, and so you are.

What is a saint? Contrary to the popular usage, a saint is not a really, really good person. Our Roman Catholic friends make a big deal of canonization of saints. That is, they identify certain Christians whom they think had such a remarkable holiness and closeness to God, that they are worthy of veneration after their deaths. They even pray to them for special help. And from this, the world has picked up the basic definition of a saint as being a really, really good person. So if someone does something really, really nice for you, like shoveling your sidewalk or stopping to help you when you are in need, you might say to them, "Oh, you're a saint." And there's nothing

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wrong with saying that. The context indicates what you mean by it. You're simply grateful that they have done a very kind thing for you.

But, biblically speaking, the word "saint" doesn't really have anything to do with how many good works you perform. I'm going to take a moment to work out the definition with you. It's related to the word "holy," so a saint is a holy person. But "holy" doesn't mean that a person is perfect or outwardly righteous. The word "holy" simply means "set apart." For example, in Old Testament times, the tabernacle, and later the temple, had all these utensils that were set apart to be used for liturgical purposes. In that sense, they were holy objects. It didn't mean that the gold in them was any different from the gold in something else, but they were set apart from common use to be used in the worship of God. And here in our church, we have a sanctuary. That's in the same word group as "saint." A sanctuary is a holy place. It doesn't mean that the cloth on your pew is morally superior to the cloth on your couch at home. It simply means that this is a space that we have chosen to set apart for the worship of God. It's where we devote ourselves to the reading of God's Word, prayer, and the use of the sacraments. We have set it apart from other places in our lives, and even from other places in this building. "Holy" simply means that something is set apart. The opposite of "holy" is "common." And to call something "common" does not necessarily mean there is anything wrong with it. It's just common or ordinary. It's the opposite of holy, which means "set apart."

And that helps us understand what a saint really is. A saint is a person who has been set apart. It doesn't mean that you're nicer or better than someone else. Although, being a Christian should make you kinder and more loving than you would be otherwise. But being a saint simply means that God has set you apart. And being set apart always means being set apart from something and being set apart to something. God has set you apart. That is, he has rescued you. He has taken you out of something, in order to put you somewhere else. So what has he set you apart from? He has set you apart from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. We were guilty with sin. By our nature inherited from Adam, for the things we have done, and for the things we have left undone, we were guilty. And because of this guilt, we were also sentenced to death. And we could not free ourselves from sin and the consequence of death. We were held captive under the power of the devil. So God set us apart from sin, death, and the devil. And he set us apart to the opposites of all these things. So what is the opposite of sin? Righteousness. What is the opposite of death? Life. And what is the opposite of the devil? God. And none of these three pairs of opposites have equal sides. Righteousness is more powerful than sin. Life is more powerful than death. And God is more powerful than the devil. So, by the power of Jesus' blood, God set you apart from sin in order to receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He set you apart from death in order to give you eternal life. And he set you apart from the power of the devil, so that you would belong to him. He set you apart, or *rescued*, you from sin, death, and the devil, in order to set you apart to righteousness, eternal life, and to belong to him as your Father.

And so, to be called a saint is essentially the same thing as to be called a child of God. It means that God has claimed you as his own. He has set you apart from the world to belong to him.

So John says, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God" (3:1). And by "Father," of course, he refers to the first person of the Trinity, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The gracious thing is that he becomes our Father too. He calls us his children. Then John goes on to say, "And so we are" (3:1). That is, God calls you his children, and so you are. He has the power to claim you as his own. He adopts you by calling you his children. Remember, this is the same God who created the world and everything in it by

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speaking. He declared it into being. So when he declares that you are his child, it becomes true. His declaration is his adoption of you. He did this in your Baptism, when you were born again as his child. And he continues to do this in his Word. When John says that we are his children, that is God's declaration that you are his child. He is adopting you as his own.

Now this is not something that happens just because God says it. When God says something, he makes it happen, but there's more to it than just speaking. There's action behind it. The blood of Jesus makes it possible. If God called us his children without making atonement for our sins, he would be unrighteous, and he would have unrighteous children. The sacrifice of Jesus, being crucified for our sin, is the power behind his declaration of adoption. The blood of Jesus purifies us from sin. It rescues us from death. It's the purchase of redemption that makes us his. So because of Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection, God the Father declares that we are his children, "And so we are." You are God's children. The God who created all things and who exercises power of everything in heaven and on earth, is your Father, and you are his child.

This should be a great comfort to us. Too often, we go through life thinking we are on our own. Too often, we feel like we have no protection, or that we have no one looking out for us. But this is not true at all. Friends or family may fail us, but your heavenly Father is always watching you, caring for you, and providing for you. There is never a moment when you are out of his watchful care. And he invites you, always, to call upon him in every time of need. He's not like earthly fathers, who are sometimes absent, or sometimes annoyed by their children's requests. He delights to hear and answer according to his infinite wisdom. If you don't believe it, pray. If he feels distant, call upon him. Then watch and see how he will answer you. That feels like a dangerous thing to tell you to do. What if someone decides to give it a shot and test God, but he doesn't answer. But I know from my experience, and many of you know from yours, that when we call upon our heavenly Father, he hears and answers. He may not always give us what we want, though sometimes he does. But he always gives us what we need. And when you wait and watch for his provision, you will see that he loves you and is attentive to you. You are his children, and he treats you graciously.

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Now we might think that if we are God's children, the world should treat us like princes and princesses. And I don't know; maybe they should. But they don't. And we should not expect them to. Why not? Because they do not recognize our Father. They do not know him, and they do not know his Son, Jesus Christ, as the King of Heaven and Earth. So John says, "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him" (1:1). Now what does that mean? Does it mean the world is blind to you, like they don't even know your name? Of course the people around you know you, but they only know what they see. They see you as ... whatever your name is. But they do not see the greater reality. They do not know you as a child of the Father. And they do not know you as princes and princesses, brothers and sisters of the King of Heaven and Earth. If they did know all this, perhaps they would treat us like royalty, but they don't, so they don't. They treat us more like they treated him. The world crucified the King of Heaven and Earth, because they did not know him as he is. And we should expect the world to treat us in the same way. If they don't, perhaps we are not being honest enough about whom we belong to. If we speak openly and boldly about Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Some will be drawn to that. They will believe and be saved. Others will hate us and persecute us for it. But it is far better to save some, while the rest hate us, than to leave the world unaware of its Savior.

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And if we receive persecution for it, we should rejoice. We should rejoice if we are considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name of Jesus (Acts 5:41). Even more, we can rejoice in the midst of suffering, knowing that we have a heavenly Father who continues to love us, and a Savior who has secured our place in the new creation. We don't have to hold on to the things of this world. The world is obsessed with the things of this world, because they think that's all there is. So they're obsessed with honor, fortune, pleasure, and health here. Whatever it is, they think this world is the only shot at it, so they're compelled to chase it here. But the Christians do not have to think that way. The children of God should not think that way.

So John goes on in verse two, "Beloved," and that's such a beautiful title. We might pass over it too quickly. "Beloved." It means "people loved by God." Listen to this: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

You are God's children now. And this is good. He tenderly cares for you now. And that means far more than any of us can possibly realize. We haven't seen anything yet. Even if we could see all of the father's love that he has for us now, we still wouldn't see anything compared to what there is to come. When Jesus appears, we shall be like him. Think about that. We will be like Jesus.

Of all the people in the world that you could be like, who would you want to be? When I was a kid, there was a commercial with Michael Jordan in it. And it had this song, "I want to be like Mike." It was supposed to sell Gatorade. I think it probably sold some shoes too. It cashed in on every boy's desire to be like Mike. Now, maybe, being just like him isn't really the best thing. You probably shouldn't want to be just like someone else. A couple weeks ago I saw a girl wearing a Caitlin Clark jersey. So I said, "O wow! Caitlin Clark is here!" She said, "I wish I was her." I said, "No; you shouldn't wish to be someone else. Maybe you wouldn't like all the other stuff in her life. Maybe you wouldn't like her parents or her friends as much as your own." There are all sorts of people that we might idolize or wish we could trade places with them. But God has made who you are, and he has placed you where you are. If you had someone else's life, you'd get all their problems too.

The only person you should desire to be like is Jesus, because he is the perfect man. And I don't simply mean that he is sinless. That's part of his perfection, but only part of it. His entire spirit and body are perfect. He lives forever without disease, without pain, without any kind of moral or physical defect. And the promise of God is that when we see him, we will be like him. That means that our bodies and souls will be like his. We will not become God, like he is, but everything that is true of his human nature will be true for us. We will finally be restored after the image of God, like Adam and Eve were before the fall into sin. This is what the resurrection of our bodies will be like.

Consider Jesus' resurrection. He died. Blood left his body. Breath left his body. His brain stopped sending signals. Everything stopped. Everything died. And that very same body was raised. It wasn't a different body. It wasn't a hologram. That body came back to life. Death and decay were reversed. Everything started working again. And it didn't just go back to the way it was before. It did not go back to being a body that can die or get sick. It went back to being a perfect body. It is a body that can and does live in perfection forever.

And that is the kind of body you will be raised with. When Jesus returns, your body will be transformed. If you remain alive until that day, it will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye. If you die before then, your body will be raised and transformed. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51). Your body will work again. People keep telling me how bad

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it is to get old. And I can see it. Unless someone dies young, we all experience that failure of our bodies. But your body will work again. It will be transformed after the image of Jesus' resurrected body.

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As children of God, this is our sure and certain hope. We do not see it yet. But we live as God's children now. And we can have confidence that, just as he did not abandon his only Son to the grave, he will not abandon all of his children through Jesus. But Jesus gave himself over to death. By his blood, he has purchased us for God. And his Father now calls you his children. And so you are. And everyone who hopes in Jesus purifies himself (3:3), and will share in his perfection forever. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.