

1 John 3:1-3

“And So We Are”

All Saints’ Day (Observed)

November 5, 2023

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.

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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1).

And so we are. On this All Saints’ Sunday, we are reminded that the Church is not limited to one place and time, but that the Church – *the City of God* – is the communion of all the saints – *all with faith and trust in Jesus*, whether they are here now or have gone before us to be with the Lord, or are still to come.

We are all God’s children! But this was not always the case.

You see, when we first entered this fallen world, it was not as God’s child, but as God’s enemy. God had so many other adjectives to describe our original status: foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved. The Apostle Paul describes our status this way: we were all sinful rebels of God **“passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another”** (Titus 3:3).

It was bad. Really bad. Stuck in our fallen sinful nature without a Savior, we all have one final destination: eternal separation from God in hell where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Now, God created us to live under His rule as His children. But we are no longer by nature children of God, because of our sin. Both the inherited sin from Adam common to all human beings, and our own sinful acts. By nature, we are not children of God, but rather spiritually blind, spiritually dead, and enemies of God. God’s Word convicts us of enmity toward Him and our own observation bears out that terrifying verdict.

Yet, by the grace of God, the love of God, we are God’s children now. And so we are.

To become God’s child is only possible because of the love of God. Oh, and never doubt His love toward you!

Despite being God's enemies, He still loved us. He desired you to be His child. He desires not the eternal death of anyone. So, He choose to adopt you into His family, making you and me the brothers and sisters of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3:26 that we are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus, for all who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. In Christ, we have become naturalized citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Sit back and notice the astonishment: ***“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are”*** (1 John 3:1). We, who are poor, miserable sinners. We, who are foolish and disobedient. We have been declared children of God. God the Father's love for His children is far beyond anyone's expectations.

And so we are. By God's grace, through the water and the Word in Holy Baptism, we are made naturalized citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. But what would this citizen certificate look like? Well, it might look a lot like the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12. This certificate would identify you as being poor in spirit, one who mourns, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, persecuted.

Some things on that list may seem more attractive than others, and that is the point. Those who follow Jesus are out of step with the mass of sinful humanity. Their attitudes and values and longings have been reoriented by Christ. They desire the kingdom of God.

You may notice, when seeing the crowds Jesus sat down on the mountain, then His disciples came up to hear Him. With these words, Jesus invites them and us to sit. Because you follow Me, this is who you are. Because they heard His call, believed in Him and trusted in Him, He speaks the word “blessed” to them for their desire of God's kingdom.

Through faith in Him, they will know, see, and live what they have desired. “Blessed” is the word Jesus uses for His followers. And so we are.

With blessing, He has invited all the saints who have gone before us to listen to His voice. With blessing, He invites us to His teaching. Because of God's love for you in Christ, because you have died and risen with Christ in Holy Baptism, you are blessed.

Jesus has called you, and you now sit in front of Him as He Himself teaches you everything necessary for life in the kingdom.

Notice what Jesus teaches immediately following the Beatitudes: you will be persecuted. More and more in society, Christians are somehow abnormal and out of step with the times. Some view Christians as dangerous. But what does Jesus say as our response when persecution comes, ***“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you”*** (Matthew 5:12).

If, and when, you are persecuted for your faith, you will find yourselves in good company. You are one with the prophets and the apostles and all the rest who have confessed the name of Jesus Christ. You find yourself in the City of God with all the Saints, both living and departed. And so we are.

For those who have gone before us, such as our brother in Christ Ed Schmidt in the past year, they are all looking at Jesus. For they see Him as He is. They cannot take their eyes off Him. No longer do they see Him dimly, but they now see Him face-to-face. They are children of God who are now home with the Father. They are basking forever in the warmth of the Father’s great love for them and for us. They are there. They know they are there before the Lord solely because their robes have been washed clean by the blood of Jesus. They are blessed. Every one of Jesus’ Beatitudes is fulfilled for them, for ***“theirs is the kingdom”*** (Matthew 5:3, 10). They are comforted. They are satisfied. They see God. They are called sons of God. They are pure in heart.

But what about us? We, like those in the Church Triumphant in heaven, are also looking in one direction. Some days, our sinful nature may lead us to glance a different direction, but Saints in the now and not yet, are all looking at Jesus.

Now, we do not see Jesus as He is, for we are still living here in the fallen world. But we do hear His Voice in His Word. We are washed by Him in Holy Baptism. We hear Him pronounce absolution of our sins. And we feed on Him in His body and blood under bread and wine, which gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Like the saints before us, we know we live and love only by grace. Every day we come before the Lord, confessing our many sins and doubts and failures. We take comfort in the promise, ***“Everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies Himself as He is pure”*** (1 John 3:3).

We become pure only by Jesus' blood and by His atoning death for us. He alone washes us clean, since it is only ***“the blood of Jesus His Son [that] cleanses us from all sin”*** (1 John 1:7).

It is the blood of Jesus that washes us clean. Through Holy Baptism, we were adopted as a child of God. In the Sacrament of the Altar, the blood of Jesus is poured out for us to restore our life by forgiving our sins.

Now, God the Father looks at us as He sees His Son Jesus, forgiven, washed, covered, made alive with His life, and wearing the white robe of righteousness that covers all of our sin and death.

We, like the Saints in heaven, hear Jesus' Beatitudes also for us. We are still ***“poor in spirit,”*** as we mourn and hunger and thirst for righteousness. We are called to be peacemakers, to be pure in heart. We are often persecuted for righteousness' sake. But in Jesus, we hear the promise too. We can take to heart the promise of the kingdom, that the meek ***“shall inherit the earth.”*** We look for mercy and trust the promise that with hearts purified in Christ, we ***“shall see God.”***

We know that we are not to seek the praise of this fallen world but seek only to be faithful to the Word of God and, through the Holy Spirit, we grow in His grace.

As fellow redeemed in Christ, we know that we will never achieve moral perfection and total purity in this fallen world. God's Word says: ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”*** (1 John 1:8). So, obedience to God's will is always less than perfect. Jesus came to declare war on sin, which in every case is rebellious lawlessness against the holy will of God. Sin is evil. So, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we hate sin too. As Christians, we refuse to get comfortable with sin, as we declare war on sin, too.

As God purifies us as He is pure in His Means of Grace – *His Word and Sacraments*, we are reminded that true believers may fall into sin, but they never surrender. True believers may fall into sin, but they repent, welcome Christ's forgiveness, and affirm their desire to change in the hope to be like Him.

4 Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

For All the Saints (LSB 677, stanza 4) Text: Public domain

And so we are – children of God knowing that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +