

Rev. Dan Welch All Saints' Day (Observed) November 2, 2025

The text for this morning's message is 1 John 3:1–3 which reads as follows in the New International Version of the Bible:

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on 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. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." Thus far the text.

Did you notice the title for today's sermon? "Saints Now and Then." The expression "now and then" usually means that something only happens once in a while, not regularly. Like if your doctor asks you, "Do you eat fruits and vegetables *every day*?" And *hypothetically* you respond, "Well, to be honest, Doc, not every *day*, but I do eat my fruits and vegetables every *now* and *then*!" This may be similar to the way we think about being saints. 'Every *now* and *then*, we get it right and we *act* like saints. Maybe not every day, but every now and then, sure!' This morning on this All-Saints' Sunday, that's *not* how we're going to look at being saints. Whether or not you eat your fruits and vegetables, regularly and consistently (and I hope that you do!), you are *saints now* because God calls you saints. *And* you will be saints *then* when Christ returns because God's call does not change.

Now admittedly, the short text from 1 John chapter 3 doesn't actually have the word "saint" in it. *But* it *does* have the word *children* in it. And in a very special *sense, too*: It says "children of *God*" *real children of God*. Today we're going to see that God lavishes love on us so that we *are real* children of God now and forever.

John begins our text, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on 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." (v 1).

On All Saints' Sunday we remember the children of God, the saints of God, who have gone on before us into heaven. In particular we commemorate by name those whose funerals we've had in the past year.

Generally, at funerals of Christians, we match the Word of God to the life of His saint who has died. This morning, I will use as an example my sister Diane who passed away last December. As I run through the events of her life and match it up with various Bible verses, I would like you also to think about a loved one or friend of yours that you have lost in recent years.

As I mentioned, at funerals, we match Scripture to life, beginning with Ecclesiastes 3:2: There is “a time to be born.” Diane Margaret Welch was born November 12, 1961, to Robert and Joanne Welch in Minneapolis, MN. Then, John 3:3: “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” God caused Diane to be born again as His dear child in the waters of Holy Baptism. Then Romans 10:9: “Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.” Diane was instructed in the Evangelical Lutheran faith and confessed that faith in the rite of confirmation at St. Paul’s Ev. Lutheran Church in Minneapolis in May of 1976. God said in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Diane was the helper that God gave to Steve Philips in holy marriage on March 28, 1981. Psalm 68:6 in the King James Version of the Bible says: “God setteth the solitary in families”. Two daughters were born to Diane and Steve, Rynne and Erin. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” Diane worked diligently for many years as an apartment building caretaker and as an employee of Rainbow foods and later Cub foods store. Diane especially had the Philippians 2:3 ability to “count others more significant”, as she was kind and humble in nature. Then back to Ecclesiastes 3:2, “there is a time to die.” Diane Philips died on December 24, 2024, at the age of 63 years, 1 month, 12 days. She is survived by her two daughters, an older sister, a younger brother, 2 nephews and 3 nieces, other relatives, and friends. She was preceded in death by her parents, her older brother, and especially by her Lord Jesus Christ, Who died and rose again so that whoever lives and believes in Him isn’t really dead!

Here’s a question I would like you to consider: When words like these are read at a funeral, who in their right mind would say that when the deceased person was born all those years ago, as a child to their parents, that that didn’t **really** happen? That would be outrageous! People saw this person, knew this person, perhaps grew up with and loved this person for many years. This dear person was a real, live person! Sadly, many people **would** say that the birth from heaven, that is, being made a child of God in Holy Baptism, never happened, that **that** was just an empty ceremony. That’s ridiculous! In the case of my sister, I saw the new Diane! I saw her new nature in her confession of faith, and in her life of faith. Her life was better, she was better, because she was a child of God. The love of God **can** be seen! “**See** what manner of love God lavished on Diane, on you, on me, on **your** loved ones and friends in Christ, that we should be called children of God—and that is what we **are**.” Each of us is just as much a real child of God as we are a real child of our earthly parents! But the world doesn’t see it that way. The world doesn’t recognize that child

because it doesn't recognize **God** the **Father**. Even Jesus was seen by some as only the child of Joseph and Mary, because they didn't recognize His Father.

"Dear friends, now we are children of God what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (v 2).

Jesus **will** come back, appear again, and we will then appear "like Him" in glorious ways we can't yet fully comprehend. But we will still be children of God, really. We will continue to exist in a way that we don't know, but we will be. I stopped with the word **be** deliberately. We don't know what we will be, but we will still exist, still be children of God. In the Old Testament, Job said that even after his body was destroyed his eyes would see God. John tells us that we shall see our Redeemer too. There is a resurrection, and we'll be there.

"Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." Verse 3 calls all this a hope, and what a wonderful hope it is!

Then, though, there's something that **sounds** like a **catch** to all these great promises. There's **always** a catch, right? A child of God that has this hope now and then "purifies himself." How can we purify **ourselves**? Am I disqualified because I can't make myself saintly enough? That's what the word **purify** means. It's directly related to the word for "saint."

No! It's not a catch. No one is disqualified whose sins are covered by Christ. Jesus' death on the cross paid for **all** sins. And just as we are justified by grace, by God's work and not ours, we are also sanctified, purified, by grace, through faith—God's work, not ours.

God does this through the means of grace: Word and Sacraments. This is how God connects what Jesus accomplished for you on the cross and the empty tomb and delivers to you personally. God calls us to faith by the Word and He keeps us in this saving faith by His Word all throughout our lives as we hear it, read it, meditate upon it, and take it to heart. And yes! God makes us His children in Holy **Baptism**, and for many of us that was as infants, when the Word of God was combined with the water in the way that Jesus commanded it. For two adults and five young children from both the Bruner and the Rodriguez families, that happened yesterday here at this font. Holy Baptism is how the salvation that was accomplished for the world on Calvary is delivered to you personally! What's more, in the Lord's Supper God feeds us with the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and strengthening in faith throughout our lives.

God made you His child, now **and** then. Through the Means of Grace, His Word and Sacraments, God **keeps** His children clean so that we **are** His Saints

now and then; now and forever! Amen.