

Saints Now and Then

All Saints / Reformation Sun. – 11/2/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 John 3:1-3 Pastor Keith Besel

Introduction

- ✘ “Saints Now and Then” – why did I choose that title for this message? Normally when we use the expression “now and then” we mean that something only happens on occasion, but not regularly.
 - ➔ For example, Mary Beth and I are blessed, as we were this last week, to see our children and grandchildren “now and then.” It’s not all the time or even on a regular basis since they all live out of state, but “now and then” we are blessed to do so.
 - ➔ I think this is the way that we think about being saints; every now and then, you and I get it right and act like God’s saints; His holy people.
- ✘ But listen carefully to this next statement; that is not the way that God wants us to think about or look at saints here on All Saints’ Sunday. According to the Bible, you and I are – and constantly continue to be saints now! Why? because God calls you saints.
 - ➔ And yes, you will be saints then when Christ returns, not because something in your Christian nature changes at His return, but because God’s current declaration of your nature right now does not change.
 - ➔ I know this is not the way that most people – even most believers in Christ, currently think about these things. So how is it that we can say all of this so confidently about saints, especially since this text before us today in 1 John never even uses the word *saint*?
- ✘ It does say, however that God calls us *children*. But it’s not just any children, nor does it include all of the children in this world. No, God calls us “children” in a very special sense. The Greek grammar in the Bible uses what is called a genitive of possession and source; that is those who are declared by God, and made by God to be “children belonging to God.” And this is not just some symbolic use of the concept. No, we are literal, very real children – in the parent-child relationship, regardless of age – those who now belong to God, our Father.
 - ➔ And it is only by God’s love lavished upon us that we believers in Christ are God’s unique, beloved children “now” today and “then” forevermore.

I. Verse 1: The Father’s loving call now

- ✘ This morning, we’re going to explore this three-verse text one verse at a time. John begins our text in verse one, saying, as a literal translation from the Greek, “See the kind of love the Father has given to us, that we have been called children belonging to God; and thus we continue to be. On account of this, the world continually does not know us because it did not know Him.”
 - ➔ Here on All Saints’ Sunday we consider those who “have been called children belonging to God;” especially those who have left this earthly life this past year through death. Since All Saint’s Sunday last year, six of our Mt. Calvary brothers and sisters have come out of this earthly tribulation to be embraced in the loving arms of their heavenly Father. And many more of your friends and family members have done the same.
 - ➔ One of the great benefits for us children who remain here at this time is when we gather together at their funerals to intentionally match God’s Holy Word up to His work in their earthly lives.

- Ecclesiastes 3:2 says there is “a time to be born.” And so we thank God in the obituary that Jane Doe’s earthly life, for example, began on October 7, 1952, to her parents, John and Mary Doe.
- John 3:3 says, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” So we praise our heavenly Father that He caused Jane to be born again as His beloved and redeemed child, adopting her into His Christian family through His exclusive, regenerating work. You could say God “fathered her” in Baptism.
- Romans 10:9: “Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.” In order to facilitate that, Jane was instructed directly from Scripture in the Evangelical Lutheran faith; that is the Holy Christian faith. And upon completion of that instruction she confessed that faith in the rite of confirmation at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church.
- In Genesis 2:18 God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” So we remember how God joined Jane with Sam Smith in the one-flesh union of holy marriage on June 14, 1975.
- After that, in line with Psalm 68:6 we’re told that “God settles the solitary in a home”, which he does by blessing Jane and Sam with children. Likewise we remember the other various ways that God blesses Jane in this earthly life; gifting her with talents and abilities; schooling and employment; opportunities to serve God and others around her through her church and other community activities; highlighting her loving compassion, hospitality and more. Just as Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might” and Philippians 2:3 calls us to “count others more significant” than ourselves.
- And then, back in Ecclesiastes 3:2, “there is a time to die.” So we recount that Jane died on July 25, 2024, at the age of 71 years, 9 months, 18 days; acknowledging from this earthly perspective that she is survived by her husband and children, grandchildren, relatives, and friends. But most importantly we focus in that funeral on the fact that because she was preceded in death by her Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again so that whoever lives and believes in Him isn’t really dead, we know and we take great comfort in the fact that she now “enjoys eternal Paradise with Jesus where she awaits the final resurrection to our heavenly home on the day of Christ’s promised return.” (closing words of MCLC obituaries)
- ✕ Most of those things that I just mentioned don’t take place at what is popularly called “celebrations of life” today – those ceremonies performed at the mortuary or in someone’s back yard. But when all of that is remembered and honored here in our Father’s holy sanctuary at a Christian funeral, no one can deny the absolute reality of God, the Father’s unmatched love for His daughter “Jane” – both now and then at Jesus’ return.
 - ➔ You see, these are concrete, actual, historical events that have taken place. There were witnesses from Jane’s Christian family at her rebirth in baptism; fellow believers who heard her confession of faith at her confirmation, and so on. She was a real, live child belonging to God, the Father!
- ✕ Still many people try to say that the birth from heaven; being fathered by God; hasn’t really happened; that it was just an empty ceremony. But that’s ridiculous!
 - ➔ Those of us who have likewise been made to be and are now called “children belonging to God” ... we’ve seen the difference that the new cleansed nature makes in a person’s life at conversion or baptism. We’ve seen it in our own lives; in our day to day lives; our marriages and more! We know that it is very real, this life of faith as a child belonging to God.

➔ We know that God's love can be seen in His children! That's why John says, "See the kind of love the Father has given to us, that we have been called children belonging to God...". We are just as much a real child of God as we are a real child of our earthly parents!

- ✘ But this world in which we live doesn't recognize; it can't even see the new child that we have become. Why? because it refuses to acknowledge or recognize God the Father. Even Jesus – God in the flesh was seen by some as only the child of Joseph and Mary, because their unbelief blinded them to the reality of His Father.

II. Verse 2: We Continue as Children for Eternity

- ✘ Now, on to verse two; again from the original Greek, "Beloved, we continue to be children belonging to God now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed, but we know that when He is revealed, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He continues to be."

➔ Verse one emphasized the Father's undeserved and immeasurable love in coming to us in our sinful state; as children belonging only to this corrupt world that is under the devil's influence, and now transforming us into His cleansed, forgiven and holy children who belong now to Him, because of Jesus' blood that covers all of our impurities. And now verse two directs us to see that this redeemed reality in which we live now is ongoing!

➔ The first verb in verse two is what the Greek language calls a "present active indicative" verb. That means that it's describing not only an action that is true right now, but it continues. It is an ongoing activity or state of being. "We continue to be children belonging to God..." the text says.

- ✘ This is crucial to our future, because we know from Scripture that Jesus has promised that He is coming back. In fact, this verse refers to the fact "that when He is revealed, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He continues to be." You see, Jesus' present reality as the victorious, risen, ascended and reigning Savior of our souls also "continues to be" the same at His return. (a present active indicative verb)

➔ The thing is, we don't see Jesus in His current fleshly appearance in heaven right now. But we know it is glorious, even as it is something we can't fully understand right now.

- ✘ This much we do know from this text and others: we will continue to be children belonging to God, in reality. We will continue to exist in a way that we don't know, even as we do know that "we will be like Him" in some way.

➔ Philippians 3:20-21, says that we children belonging to God "await...Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body...". Job declares that even after his body would be destroyed, in the resurrection, his own fleshly eyes will see God (Job 19:27).

➔ And that's all God has seen fit to reveal to us. The rest of the details are not ours to know at this time, but we know with confidence that when Jesus comes, our bodies will be resurrected and rejoined with our spirits that have been in Paradise with Jesus (unless Jesus returns before we die of course), and we will be there before the heavenly throne, in body and soul for eternity; still children belonging to God and worshipping Jesus in purity and truth forevermore.

III. Verse 3: God Purifies His Children (saints)

- ✘ And now verse three from the Greek: "And everyone who has this hope in Him, continues to purify himself just as that one (Jesus) continues to be pure."

➔ This verse starts out easy enough. It talks about all of the true children belonging to God having "hope" in Him. This hope describes the essence of our Christian faith; that ours is not a shallow hope in God, but a confident hope of absolute certainty. Luther wrote in his famous

reformation hymn, “A mighty fortress is our God, a sword and shield victorious.” “Though life be wrenched away...The Kingdom’s ours forever!” (LSB #657, vv.1,4)

- ✘ That’s the confidence that God gave to Luther and the Reformers as He emboldened them to put their earthly lives on the line to challenge those corrupt leaders in Roman Catholic Church and the rest of the world who believed that our salvation and eternal life was up to us to work out and earn for ourselves; a false belief that is still held by the majority of people in our world today.
 - ➔ But not us, like Luther, we hold fast and unwavering to the perfect words of *Scripture Alone* that teaches us clearly that a person is saved always and only by *Grace Alone* through *Faith Alone* in Jesus Christ and not by our own effort or works!
- ✘ This unchanging Christian faith; this hope then helps us with the last phrase in verse three that might seem a bit confusing at first. It says that a child belonging to God “continues to purify himself.”
 - ➔ But how can we sinners purify ourselves? To be purified in the Biblical sense is to be made holy which is to be a “saint”. Since I can’t make myself a saint, just as I could not make myself a “child belonging to God,” what is this talking about here?
- ✘ The key to understanding this as God intends, is to take this entire text in the order that God reveals it to us. Verse one is crystal clear that the only way that you and I and anyone else can ever be “called children belonging to God” is because of and through the love that only the Father “has given to us”. It’s a gift! Only the Father has “called” and made us to be His children of faith – in His miraculous rebirthing work of baptism.
 - ➔ This then is who we are now and who we continue to be moving forward into eternity. You see it’s at baptism that God alone makes us pure – cleansing us from sin and all of Satan’s corruption – including death.
- ✘ So here in this verse, God is simply describing the ongoing nature of His cleansed children as they; as we walk in this Christian life as the purified children He has already made us to be; as His saints now today and then in eternity.
 - ➔ And today we celebrate our God and Father, who made you His child – one of His saints now and who keeps you and all of His believing children pure in the blood of Jesus forever! Amen.