

Sermon – November 1, 2020
“The Reunion of Saints (1 John 3:1-3)”
Crown of Life Lutheran Church
Pastor Dave Schilling

We start with prayer...

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day and for the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Let your grace and your peace be with those gathered here this day. Guide us that we may be all that you have called us to be. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Savior and our Lord. Amen.

Some kids were outside at recess playing on the school playground, as kids do. And, they began teasing one another. But the thing is, when kids begin teasing, they often don't know how far is too far in their teasing. And so, these kids start to pick on a girl in their class who was adopted.

“You don't know your real parents,” one of them shouted at her. “You're just adopted.” Then another one chimed in, “You don't even have real parents!” The girl began to walk away.

And just when you would have imagined she'd burst into tears, she turned around and said, “Oh, yeah? Well, I feel bad for you. Because, when you were born, your parents felt like they HAD to keep you. My adoptive Mom and Dad actually want me, and I know it! They chose me to be in their family.”

And that shut the other kids up.

As we celebrate this All Saints Day on our church calendar, we again hear from of the Apostle John's first letter, which was our second lesson this morning...

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” 1 John 3:1

Notice that John did not say that we should be called “people” of God; not just “followers” of God; and not simply “servants” of God - though these are all true.

It is far more intimate than that. John said “...we should be called CHILDREN of God! And that is what we are! “

On this All Saints Day, we celebrate the beautiful reality that we are children of God - brought into God's family through adoption ... through no doing of our own, we are children of God.

And, like that little girl, each of us can say of our adoption, “God the Father actually wanted ME in His family, and I know it! He chose me to be in His family

... forever.”

God the Father wanted you and me in His family so much, that He sent His only Son to make it happen. Because, like “Little Orphan Annie” caught in the clutches of Miss Hannigan, we were caught in the clutches of sin, death and the devil, unable to free ourselves.

But, God the Son made our adoption into this family possible.

Jesus took on human flesh, experienced the “hard-knocks of life in this world,” died in our place on the cross, and rose again.

Jesus paid the price for our adoption, and in our baptism, that adoption is made complete. Because in those waters of Baptism, we leave behind the “old orphan in us.”

God the Father now looks at us, and sees the perfect work and life of His Son.

He calls you by name, He calls you a saint, He calls you His child. “SEE what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we [of all people] should be called children of God. And that is what we are.”

Now, God the Holy Spirit works to keep us in this family. The Spirit works to keep us in this family through the Word proclaimed to us, stirring up our hearts to believe in Jesus in even the most difficult circumstances.

The Spirit works to keep us in the family through the means of grace, bringing us forgiveness and equipping us for sanctified living ...for godly living.

But on All Saints Day, we also celebrate the Spirit’s work through the fellowship of believers, as we rejoice with those who rejoice; as we mourn with those who mourn; as we display the love of Christ toward one another.

In the context of fellowship on All Saints Day, we see that we’re children of God remembering the good old days.

I’m sure you’ve probably gone to a family reunion before.

Unfortunately, these days most family reunions seem to happen only at funerals. And, you often hear family members saying to each other - “Boy, it’s too bad we don’t get together more often, when everyone’s alive.”

I visited my family for a funeral service 3 weeks ago in Oregon, and that is

exactly what was said numerous times.

Family reunions are sort of fading out; not quite as popular as they once were. But when you've got a good family reunion - and I mean a really GOOD family reunion - it's quite an ordeal!

We're talking matching t-shirts, a smorgasbord of food; and perhaps old traditions and games that have been in the family for years.

Family members come from far and wide to get reacquainted with relatives they haven't seen or heard from in years. There's a deep, yet strange bond you possess with these people ... even some whom you may reluctantly call "family".

There are some relatives you've never met; some you've only heard stories about; others you get too many updates about on Facebook, or through your great aunt Ethel.

But there is a bond that unites you - no matter the distance, no matter how long it's been, no matter if you've never even met. You are family.

And, you know, it always happens at these reunions that you hear the same old stories, over and over; year after year.

I can still hear my Dad reminiscing about some early hunting and shooting episodes he and some of my uncles experienced.

He would tell us kids about the time he was in a family hunting camp, when my Uncle Dale threw a silver dollar in the air, fired 6 shots at it from a semi-automatic 22-pistol, and he hit the dollar two times in the air!

I display that dollar in my office today, as a reminder of my family.

Until my Dad and my Uncle Dale both passed away, they used to tell that story, and other similar stories, every time they got together. And they would tell them as if it was for the first time, forgetting the fact that we all knew the stories by heart.

But they told these stories over and over, because it was their chance to relive the good old days; days when they were younger; days when they had more hair; days when they didn't have as many worries, or at least not the same kind of worries they faced later in their lives.

But we do this to, don't we? We tell the same stories over and over again - maybe not about hunting and shooting - but we've all got stories we share over

and over.

We tell these stories again and again so that we don't forget. We tell them to pass them on to the next generation, to tell them where they came from. We tell these stories to take pride in who we are - in our identity in our family.

When you think of family reunions, well, that's sort of what it's like to be a child of the Heavenly Father; to be a member of the family of God; to be part of the communion of saints.

All Saints Day is like one big reunion of saints. It is like family members at a reunion looking back, so we look back to the example of our brothers and sisters in Christ long ago.

To hear about where we came from. We also look to the lives of those who left us only recently. Some of these folks we've heard of - some even have days, churches, and cities named after them - but other of these saints, not so much.

Some of these saints are from distant lands, distant eras; others, might have sat in that chair right where you are sitting right now.

Nevertheless, they are all part of this big family of saints. So, we look to their example of faith, as examples for ourselves.

But, lest we allow All Saints Day to become a sort of "funeral reunion," focusing only on the dead in Christ, keep in mind - it's really a day for the living.

A day for all saints alive in Christ forever. A day to look ahead to the joys of eternity. Today is ... YOUR day!

In fact, the reunion of saints happens every single week ... as we gather together, the communion of saints, united around Word and Sacrament - not just with those present, but crossing time and space, uniting all of God's saints.

And in these weekly reunions, don't we tell the same old stories over and over again? After all, there is only ONE Gospel ... so our challenge always is to keep the Gospel fresh as we tell the story over and over again.

The readings we use in worship are from an established 3-year listing of lessons from the Old Testament, the Epistle, and the Gospels. The church has been reading from this list for nearly 2,000 Years. The same readings have been shaping the faith and lives of all the saints for centuries.

And as we hear the Law and Gospel proclaimed, as we hear about God's work in

the lives of His people since the beginning of time, we begin to learn from the mistakes of our ancestors in our faith family.

We learn from them, and then, by grace, we strive toward the example of Christ they displayed. And every year, as we come to another All Saints Day, we commemorate the faithful departed.

We may hear the names of our loved ones who have passed. And for a moment, we may mourn once again - because we're human, and we can't help it.

For a moment, perhaps we even wish they were here with us, again - because we can't quite comprehend eternity with Christ. Memories of them may flood our minds.

And for a moment, we may wish things would go back to the way it used to be. But to go back wouldn't help. To go back wouldn't help them. To go back wouldn't take away other pains.

We may long for the good old days, but God has something better planned! So, while we may look back, it is significantly better for us to look ahead.

We are children of God, remembering the good old days, but planning for the final family reunion of saints. Because Christ is coming again - and soon! Any day, now, Christ is coming, and His return will mark a never-ending family reunion.

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. 1 John 3:2

Yes, God has adopted us, but He has not told us everything about what will happen to us, especially after we die and join Him for eternity.

But the Apostle John got a glimpse of our final family reunion of saints as he was preparing the Book of Revelation. As John describes it, all saints - all of God's countless children - you, me, our loved ones in Christ from our past, present and future will gather for a feast, a smorgasbord of victory.

Even better than matching t-shirts, we'll don matching white robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb.

And we'll sing old, yet new family songs. The reunion will go on for an infinite number of days.

And we'll tell the same old family story, as if it were new and fresh ... about a

God who cared so much for His creation; about a Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep; about a Father who loved us enough to call us children ... and so we are!

Jesus is coming.

The final family reunion is about to happen. But until then, Jesus calls us to prepare. He calls us to eat at the family dinner table ... the Altar ... and to come sit here in this family room, and He says come often.

He calls us to be disciples and make disciples - because there are still chores to do in this family ... we still have responsibilities.

He calls us to love even our enemies. He calls us to live like we've been baptized; to live like we are saints; to live like we are really part of His family.

By the Holy Spirit's enabling, we bear the family resemblance in our words and actions.

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is **WHAT** we are!"

Come soon, Lord Jesus, come soon. Amen.