

Sermon All Saints 2021

November 7, 2021

I John 3:1-3

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

Often as I sit down to write my sermons, I take a look back at sermons in past years to look at how I've approached the readings in the past. As I did that this week, one thing I noticed is that I usually begin All Saint's Day with an explanation of the word "saint" as we use it in this context. But I think it's good to do that. As I've heard it said many times, repetition is the mother of learning. So, a reminder then, that as we speak of All Saint's Day, we are remembering, in particular, those who have gone before us in the faith. This isn't limited to those that we think of as especially exemplary, but all of those who have gone before us in the faith. What I mean is that we often associate the word "saint" with Saint Peter, or Saint Paul, or even a church father like Saint Augustine. This is especially true because that is the official use associated with Roman Catholicism. But within our church, it just means holy ones. The saints are those who are holy by faith in Jesus. This is what Paul speaks of when he starts his letters to those called to be saints in Corinth, or the saints in Ephesus.

This means that you are a saint. And what does that mean? It means you are holy. You see the word saint is from the Latin word "*sanctus*" which translates as "holy." That's why we call the section of the service where we sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" "The Sanctus". When that originated in Latin they said "*sanctus*" three times. But you as a Christian are sanctified. You are holy by the work of the Holy Spirit. Of course, I'm sure you know that, but that also bears repeating. You have been made holy in the blood of Jesus. As He died for your sins on the cross, all of your sin which makes you unholy, which taints you, makes you impure, all of that was paid for. Sin deserves just anger and punishment, and just anger and punishment was poured out on Jesus in your place.

With having been in the accounting world before going to seminary, you have maybe heard me teach in Bible Class or New Members' Class about this in accounting terms. You can think of it like Jesus' work in His life and His death earned merit in an account for you. Now, the Roman Catholic Church speaks of a Treasury of Merit, and this is different than that because the merit I'm talking about is earned by Jesus and Jesus alone. In Roman Catholicism, the capital S "Saints"—like Peter, Paul, and Augustine—they earn merit for that treasury that you can pray will be applied to you.

For us as Lutherans, it's not like that. Jesus earns that merit for you by Himself in His life and death. And then by His resurrection and ascension He is exalted that He can send the Holy Spirit who brings that and applies it to you.

That means that what happens is that as He baptizes you, as He speaks His Word to you, as He feeds you with His Holy Supper, He makes you holy in Him. He takes the debt that's in your account and He removes it putting all of the benefit from His work in its place. You get that benefit by faith, by trusting in it.

To use the imagery of purity, your sin which taints you is then covered over by His purity and righteousness as you receive His work by faith. Not something you do, but something you passively receive. In other words, you are a holy saint, and your holiness comes from Jesus. He gives it to you in His Word and Sacraments.

Now, as we hear the lesson from I John today, we can hear this as He says, **“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”** Hear how this is a gift? See the love the Father has *given* to us? It's His holiness won by Jesus given to you. And do you earn a gift? No. It's free to you. It's not earned. If it were earned, it wouldn't be a gift. It would be a payment. This is given to you; this love. And how do you hear it there? It's love that you should be called the children of God.

God has looked at you and He has called you His child. We often sing the song “God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It,” and that fits so well with this. Think about the rest of that sentence: “God's own child, I gladly say it, I am baptized into Christ.” And there you see something important. You have this holiness, you receive it by faith, but it is inherently connected to your baptism. As that water was poured over you, God put His Name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit upon you. He made you His own. You are His holy child. Just as the heavens opened at Jesus' baptism and the Father said, **“This is my Son whom I love, with whom I am well pleased,”** because baptism unites you with Jesus, that same word is spoken to you.

And think about how that works, how that word works. You know that's a point I make a fair amount, but it's good to make again. When you hear that word, it does what it says, and it makes you His own. “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” That word spoken with water carries with it the whole weight of your eternal life. And it is your adoption in His Sonship. It calls you to that reality by which you are a child of God, His holy child. To say this another way, this holiness is grounded in your identity in Him.

As I say that identity is something we think a lot of about in our day, isn't it? I was listening to a podcast of some people way smarter than me. But one of them started talking about identity. He said, if you would ask about, say Augustine's understanding of identity, he would have had no idea what you're talking about. But everything around is all about figuring out identity. How do you identify? As male, female, heterosexual, homosexual, pansexual?

Your identity is in that adoption. You belong to the Lord. And think about how that gives you security. I read an article about a lineman in the NFL named Lane Johnson this week. He had recently made public struggles that he has about depression and anxiety. And one of the things he noted in that is how after football games, one of the first things he would do would be to get on Twitter and search his name. He was looking there for identity, for affirmation. Did people see that he had a good game? Did they see he had a bad game? What did they say about him? Here's this 300 lb mammoth of a man, and he's getting on social media to find his identity and worth.

Of course, that's where the world tells you to find it. But you have that word of your baptism which gives you yours. You have that identity as a holy one, as a saint. You have the identity as one for whom Christ has paid all of your debt, but whom the Father has adopted in Holy Baptism, so you would not doubt who and whose you are. You are a saint.

Finally, as I say that, though, John speaks a bit more here about this. He says, **"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. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."** Now what John is saying is that you are God's children now, but the fullness of what that looks like won't be seen finally until Jesus comes back. At that point we'll see Him like He is, and because He has sanctified us, made us holy, we will be seen as He is as well.

But something that's kind of neat about this is that even though the English word used here is appear, in Greek it's actually the same word John uses at the beginning of this letter. In the beginning of chapter one he says, **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have**

**fellowship with us.**” In other words, he’s saying, we saw Jesus. We saw Him with our eyes. We touched Him with our hands. And in that we saw life made manifest. And then he says, “and that’s what we proclaim to you.” What’s my point? John says that he’s telling people about Jesus who was really there and whom John touched and saw in person. And as he’s doing this, he’s talk about God making life manifest.

That’s the word that’s the same in Greek. When Jesus appears again, when He is manifest again at the end of time, we too will be made manifest as holy in Him. That’s the hope that John has told the Church about, proclaiming it that we would have fellowship with him. That’s the hope you hear proclaimed to you in John’s letter so that you would have fellowship in that holiness to. And that’s the hope he says that purifies you as Jesus is pure. **“And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”**

Now as I say that, one thing to consider in light of this is that this hope is what purifies you. This purification isn’t about your effort to make yourself clean from sin. It’s not about how hard you try to not sin that makes you pure. No. It’s this work of Jesus that does it all for you, that makes you holy. However, as you are this blessed saint, you do manifest that holiness, that life, just as Jesus manifest that life to us. You manifest it by trusting in God, trusting in His Word, trusting in what He says about you, trusting that His Word is worth hearing and knowing, more than all the riches in the world. And you manifest it by loving your neighbor.

If you read the whole letter of First John, he makes a big deal about that, about that love. You see, I think there’s a strong connection between holiness and love. And I think that because of what John says about God here in this letter. This is where He says **“God is love.”** And as we see that, which you see in the love of Jesus poured out for you, we see that God also is righteous and holy. So, righteousness and holiness show forth in true love: love as God has loved you; love that is purified by Him, known by His Word, known in deeds of care, forgiveness, mercy, devotion to others. You are holy, and your holiness will manifest itself in those ways. You can’t but help for it to. Why not? Because you are a saint. You are His holy child. Jesus has won that holiness for you, given it to you as a gift. The Father has called you as His own, and you will appear so at the end of time. **Everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies Himself as He is pure.** Amen.