

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: 1 John 3:1–3**

**Sermon: “Our Hope”**

All Saints’ Day is a time of comfort. Each year we say goodbye to loved ones who have died in the faith. Death remains an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26); despite having been defeated by Jesus’ death and resurrection, it will continue to afflict humanity until the Last Day, when Jesus will return and the dead will come forth from their graves.

However, our text from 1 John comforts all who mourn with the promise that death is not the end for those who are the children of God. While they are in the world, they see the effects of death and decay, but John reminds his readers that this will not be their end.

Those who are called children of God need not be concerned with such things, because when Jesus appears, we will see him, and we will be like him. Death, sin, and the devil are removed, and only eternal life awaits.

This festive day in the Church Year we pray will bring great comfort to all who have lost loved ones to death. Comfort comes through the promise that what to the world appears to be a loss becomes a transition for the Christian. John reminded his readers that the world will bring trouble, but those who are children of God have received the promised hope that death has already been emptied of its power. We do have hope! And we have it in the one who did what it took to make us God's children:

Our Hope as God's children is in Jesus. Our hope is always under attack by worldly, sinful, and satanic lies. Our hope is attacked by the world.

At the time of John's writing, the church continued to suffer attacks from both Jewish and Gentile religions. Many apostles had been martyred by this time. Still to this day, many Christians around the world are martyred. We in the United States have seen only nominal threat. But it appears the future could bring greater hostility toward the church and, with it, an eroding of our hope.

Besides open persecution, secular forces have eroded confidence in the biblical narratives through higher criticism and a denial of the miracles presented in Scripture such as the virgin birth, miraculous healings, exorcisms, Jesus' resurrection, life after death, and divine creation. And always, death, disease, and suffering surround us. Some of us have lost loved ones this year. It can all cause a continual degeneration of the hope that we have toward the world and sometimes even toward the promises of God.

Our hope is attacked by our own sinful condition. No matter how hard we try to cling to the promises of God and the hope such promises bring, we may continue to find ourselves questioning whether such promises could really be for us. We recognize our sin, and we question, "Can God really forgive what I've thought, said, or done?"

Our hope is constantly under attack by the devil and his demons. The devil is the accuser who will not let our sin go unchallenged (Revelation 12:10). The devil seeks to separate us from the promises of God and lead us to despair.

The question he put to Eve in the garden still haunts us: “***Did God actually say?***” (Genesis 3:1).

The world and our own sinful condition continue to tell us lies that we often believe. The devil then uses such lies to cause a questioning of God’s promises and the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. But the truth is, we are children of God! All Christians face spiritual weaknesses. It is important to recognize this. Too often, Christians fail to share their weaknesses with one another, leading to self-doubt: “Why do I struggle so much while other Christians seem to be doing so well? Am I really a child of God?” We are called to carry one another’s burdens as we support and encourage one another in faith.

Instead of looking internally for our hope, we must look to the truth of who we are in Jesus. Hope that is self-applied will always fail us. Real hope can never be found inside ourselves or in the conditions we observe in our lives. The only hope that’s guaranteed is the hope that sees what’s been done completely outside ourselves, completely for us: that is, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Only in Jesus, through the eyes of faith, will we really retain the hope that sustains us.

And here's what the eyes of faith see: ***"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are"*** (v 1a). The "eyes of faith" are really ears of faith that simply hear and believe what God says: ***"children of God; and so we are."***

What love the Father has given! not deserved or earned but lavished upon us without any merit or worthiness in us. It is a love we have received, a pure gift from our Father in heaven. We are children of God! God the Father has called us through his Son, Jesus Christ. We have been incorporated into the family of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through the Word and the water of Holy Baptism.

True, though ***"the world does not know us"*** (v 1b). When things go badly, enemies attack us, we may think that means we are not children of God. But John reminds how the world treated Jesus: rejection, torture, death. If the world has treated Jesus in such a way, the children of God should not expect any better.

And amid such suffering, John reminds us to look to Jesus' resurrection.

***“See what kind of love the Father has given to us”*** (v 1). The love that we have received is a pure gift from our Father in heaven through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus. Therefore, we are children of God! And therefore, in Jesus, here is our hope! (v 2).

We have the hope that, beyond this life, we shall be like Jesus. One of these days, Jesus is going to appear again, in glory, coming back from heaven for all to see. We don't know everything about that day or what life will be like afterward. But we do know that our bodies will be raised, our own real, human bodies, and that our bodies and the bodies of all the saints our loved ones who've died in Christ will be glorified, like his glorious body, to live together with him forever.

This is certain, because our hope is founded on the reality of Jesus' incarnation and divinity and on the fact that he completed everything that was incomplete within us.

He entered our stead, became a sinner for us. He carried our sin to the cross and to death, so that in his resurrection the sin, death, and devil that cling to us would be removed and purified. Our purity is based in Jesus' righteousness. All sin is washed away through Jesus' blood.

While we continue to sin in this life, Jesus continues to cover our sin with his death and resurrection. Jesus' has completed the work of our salvation through his ministry. Yet ours is not only a historical promise.

Through the Divine Service, Jesus continues to deliver the forgiveness of sins. Such forgiveness empties us of the lies from the devil, the world, and our doubts. John will not let us forget who we are. Jesus' forgiveness is perfect apart from anything within us. This is the hope we have received as children of God. It is a hope that sustains because of Jesus' righteousness.

Such a message offers great comfort as we remember those who have died in the faith. As Lutherans, we understand that we don't focus on the spiritual power or piety of those who've died.

We know there is nothing laudable in any of us before a righteous and perfect God. But we rejoice that those we love are with Jesus, awaiting the glorious day when we shall all gather before the throne of God.

The promise of Scripture is for all of God's children. ***“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”*** (Revelation 7:15–17).

Let us go forth today and every day knowing that our salvation, forgiveness, and hope are built on this promise that will never fail us. For we are in Jesus, and he is in us. Death has been defeated in his death and resurrection, and we are incorporated into this promise through the holy waters of Baptism. We will live even though we die.

Amen