

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: 1 John 3:1–3**

**Sermon: All Saints' Day 2022**

We have come together today to remember before God those who have gone before us into eternal life. During the prayers we'll name each one of them and recall others known to you and thank God for their faith and life among us. We praise God that in Jesus they have already been given their place before his throne.

What can we say of them, those who've gone before us? And what does the Word of God say this day of us, those who still remain here? Because this is hard for many of us, we need to hear the Word of God together for comfort and for direction. We'll begin today with our Epistle from the First Letter of John. **(Read 1 John 3:1–3.)**

What can we say of those who have gone before us? If we were able to see those who have gone before, we would see them all looking in one direction together. They are looking at Jesus. They now see him as he is. So, they cannot take their eyes off him. No longer do they see through a mirror dimly, but now they see face-to-face (1 Corinthians 13:12).

They are children of God who are now home with the Father. They are basking forever in the warmth of the Father's astonishingly great love for them and for us. Eternity will not be long enough to praise God for a love that gave his one and only Son into death for us. ***“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins”*** (1 John 4:10).

All that would separate us from the Father was given to Jesus to bear for us, in our place. They are there, these saints we remember, not of their own accord. In fact, they are astonished at the grace of God to give his Son for us. They know they are there before the Lord solely because they are washed clean in the blood of Jesus.

When John is granted his vision of heaven and of those around the throne ***“clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands”*** (Revelation 7:9), he is asked, ***“Who are these, . . . and from where have they come?”*** (v 13). The angel answers his own question: ***“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”*** (v 14).

This Lamb is *“their shepherd, [who] will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”*

(7:17). Here we see that God will wipe away our tears as well. What else can we say of them? They are blessed. Every one of Jesus’ Beatitudes is fulfilled for them. “Theirs is the kingdom.” They are comforted; they are satisfied; they see God; they are called sons of God. They are pure in heart and rejoice in their reward (Matthew 5:2–12).

The world may not know them or remember them much (1 John 3:1) but the Lord remembers them and acknowledges them forever. You all know of many people who served the Lord quietly, with no fanfare here, but now are home there in eternal life.

It is as the hymn says: **“Despised and scorned, they sojourned here; But now, how glorious they appear! Those martyrs stand, A priestly band, God’s throne forever near. On earth they wept through bitter years; Now God has wiped away their tears, Transformed their strife To heav’nly life, And freed them from their fears”** (LSB 676:2).

Do you see the wonderful things we can say in Jesus of those who have gone before us in the faith, and what great promises God has fulfilled for them? And the best news is that these promises are not only for those who've gone before! The promises are also for us. What can we say about us?

We said the saints are all looking in one direction, all looking at Jesus. We do not yet see him as he is, for we are still here. But we do hear him in his Word. We are washed by him in Baptism. We feed on him in his body and blood.

Now he calls us to follow him. And remembering that ***“we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,”*** all the saints who have gone before us, we ***“run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”*** (Hebrews 12:1–2).

His Word gives us the vision of all those saints around the throne saying, ***“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*** (Revelation 7:10), and we remember that all of this begins even now in our worship here. This Lamb, our Savior Jesus, has made us children of the Father, as John calls us to ***“see what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are”*** (v 1). Hear the sense of wonder and astonishment in those words, that we poor sinners, in Jesus, call God our Father. That he invites us to pray as dear children, “Our Father.” We revel in his astonishing love for us, and we seek to love one another (1 John 4:7).

Like the saints before us, we know we live and love only by grace. Every day we come before the Lord, confessing our many sins and doubts and failures. We take comfort together in the promise, ***“Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure”*** (v 3). This happens in Jesus by his blood and by his death for us. He washes us clean, as John also proclaimed, in ***“the blood of Jesus his Son [which] cleanses us from all sin”*** (1 John 1:7).

There is a manner in which these words may seem strange to our ears. Doesn't blood actually stain our hands and our clothes, not wash them? How can blood cleanse rather than stain? Well, of course, it's the blood of Jesus, but think of the purpose of blood in our bodies. If you tie off part of your body with a tourniquet, you will soon feel that part of your body tingling, because the blood is pooling there, and the poisons are beginning to build up. When the flow is restored to that part of the body, the tingling goes away as the poisons are washed away!

Have you ever witnessed someone in a horrific accident who is losing a lot of blood. You can see the life drain from their face as they lie nearly dead, but with a transfusion, life is restored. With each ounce of blood, you could see the life returning to their body. This is what happens spiritually when the blood of Jesus cleanses us from the poison of sin. The blood of Jesus is there in our Baptism to wash us clean. The blood of Jesus is poured out for us in the Lord's Supper to restore our life, forgiving our sins. Now God looks at us in Jesus, forgiven, washed, covered, made alive with his life, wearing the white robe of his goodness covering all our sin and death. What else can we say?

We are still ***“poor in spirit,”*** mourning, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. We are called to be peacemakers, to be pure in heart. We are often persecuted for righteousness’ sake. But in Jesus, we hear the promise too. We can take heart in the promise of the kingdom, that the meek ***“shall inherit the earth.”*** We look for mercy and trust the promise that with hearts purified in Christ, we ***“shall see God”*** (Matthew 5:2–12).

Finally, we know we ought not seek the praise of the world but seek only to be faithful to the Word of God and to grow in his grace. We look forward to the fulfillment, for ***“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”*** (v 2). And we look for Jesus to send his Spirit in the Word that we might ***“with unveiled face, [behold] the glory of the Lord, [and be] transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”*** (2 Corinthians 3:18). So, we are thankful to live simply in the love God has for us.

What more is there to say? The saints in heaven live forever before the Lord. They see him face-to-face, for they are with him always. Take comfort, O people of God, take comfort in these promises, as we remember our loved ones who have gone before. Find blessing in Jesus, who has washed us clean and *“freed us from our sins by his blood”* (Revelation 1:5). Know that you are his own dear child forever, and that he calls us to love one another. And when we are discouraged by the fight against sin, death, and devil, we can remember again what we sang today: **“And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, Steals on the ear the distant triumph song, And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia! The golden evening brightens in the west; Soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest; Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!”** (LSB 677:5–6).

In the name of Jesus. Amen