

Sermon Draft

Text: 1 John 3:1–3

Sermon: All Saint's Day 2016

Most of us were born a citizen of the United States. We didn't have a say about it and probably weren't really aware of it this till we took classes in school about civics or remember "Americanism verses Communism" in high school. Most take their citizenship for granted. We learn from the examples of famous Americans who make and shape this country we call home. Even after we start to learn about this country we still don't grasp what citizenship entails, how we have been given certain rights and responsibilities.

Being a part of a family is similar. We are born into a family not of our own choosing. We learn what it means to be part of a family and what family membership entails as we grow older. We learn from the models that our parents and older siblings set for us along the way.

All Saints' Day is an occasion to remember and celebrate that as believers in Christ we are all members of a very special family, the family of saints. But to say we are all saints is to say that we are members of the family of God. The apostle John says straight out to begin our text this day, ***"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).

So on this day that we celebrate and remember loved ones and friends who have died in the faith. So what does it mean that we and them are part of the family of God? As sisters and brothers through the gift of our baptism, through the gift of faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we have been given rights and privileges that only belong to children of God.

This gift of becoming a child of God is another gift of love from God, because we're not by nature his children. In fact, we are by nature enemies of God seeking our own way and own pleasure. Of course, that wasn't the way it all began but because of sin everything changed. Our sin separated us from God. That's why out of love He gave sent His Son to redeem and reconcile us to our Father.

God's Son became one of us, born a tiny baby on that first Christmas over two thousand years ago. And for us and in our stead Jesus kept all the demands that God's Law places on us as human beings and He did it perfectly. The ultimate gift of love was giving His life, allowing them to nail Him to that cross giving His life in our stead paying the cost for our sins.

Now because of Christ's great and perfect sacrifice we aren't just called children of God, we are children of God! And with this wonderful gift come amazing privileges. In our sin we were slaves, but now as members of God's household we have been set free.

"So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Galatians 4:7).

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are given the gift of faith, faith that now saves but also this same Spirit is always with us to guide, direct and help us live our lives as children, sons and daughters of God.

God promises always to be with us, a loving Father always doting over His children, always watching over us and always listening to our prayers. He knows our needs before we do and provides all that we need for body and soul.

For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son, think about that God the Father loves us so much that He sacrificed His own Son that we can be redeemed and reconciled to Him.

We are now sisters and brothers in Christ and now co-heirs with Him. This means we have as our inheritance the gift of heaven! Heaven! ***“If children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him”*** (Romans 8:17). Wow!

This includes a resurrection of our bodies and new life in the world to come. We don't know everything about how that will look, but when Christ appears on the Last Day, we know that we will be changed to appear in glory like his.

Being part of the family of God comes with great responsibility just like that which comes with family membership. We are called to live our lives as the purified people that Christ has made us to be (v 3). We are no longer to look like the world around us.

The world should not even recognize us, because it didn't recognize Christ as God's Son, and we should look like him (v 1b). We are to bear the family resemblance, or to put it another way when others see us they see Christ in us and through us. A goal for us as we live and walk in faith is that those around us see less of us and more of Christ.

As members of the family of God, we live out our vocation as the priesthood of the baptized, called to offer spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5). Because we are members of the family of God we are truly blessed.

Our Gospel lesson reminds us of just how blessed: The Beatitudes (Mathew 5:3–11) are blessings from God. As such, they come in a long line of words by which God blesses his people.

God blesses Abram in Gen 12:2: ***“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”*** God promises Abram land, many descendants, and that he will be a blessing to the nations. God fulfills this *blessing* through Jesus Christ, who gives us the land of the New Jerusalem by making the Holy Christian Church the ultimate offspring of Abraham. Through Abram’s line would come the blessing of Jesus Christ, who would give the blessing of salvation through his death and resurrection.

God blesses Israel through Aaron in Numbers 6:22–27, ***“You shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, ‘The LORD bless you and keep you. . . . So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.’”***

This is God’s grace and favor on Aaron and Israel. Through Jesus Christ, the Lord puts his name on us and blesses us too.

We could list countless other blessings from God through the Scriptures. But notice what they all have in common. All blessings, every good thing God gives us, is because of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the “Blessed One” of the Beatitudes who gives us those same blessings by giving us his perfect holiness, his “sainthood.” And Jesus’ death on the cross, by removing the sin that would have separated us from God, is the reason for every blessing we receive from him. God is all about blessing us His children.

To be a part of the family of God means that we learn from the family of God, the elders in the faith. This is one of the reason we come together in Bible classes and worship to learn and grow.

Saints of the church throughout the ages are examples to us of relying on God and bearing witness to his working within them.

Martin Luther in the Large Catechism: **“Thus we must regard Baptism and make it profitable to ourselves, that when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say: Nevertheless I am baptized; but if I am baptized, it is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body”** (LC IV 44).

Today we remember the saints of the church here at Peace and later in our prayers we will hear the names of those who have transferred to the Church Triumphant this past year and celebrate their new life with Christ in heaven remembering that someday we to will be there with them.

Our call to the family of God is to recognize a reality beyond our own experiences, our own failures, and our own disappointments. It is a call to remember who we are and whose we are. Full of hope, grounded in the promises of God, who claims us as his own and who will never let us go.

Amen