

See what love has done

Bible reference for sermon 1 John 3:1-3

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Today, we gathered around the baptismal font to celebrate James and Isla being welcomed into the family of God. We heard promises of grace spoken over them and remembered that they are part of a story much bigger than themselves. It is a story stretching back through generations of people who have lived and died in faith. It is carried by parents and grandparents, friends and strangers, by people whose names we remember and countless others whose quiet acts of love have shaped the church and the world. And it continues through these children, through us, and through generations still to come.

Today, as we celebrate these baptisms on All Saints Day, we remember that we belong to one another across time and even beyond death. We belong to a family held together not by our achievements or perfection, but by the generous, unending love of God. The writer of 1 John gives us words that capture this beautifully: **“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.”**

That is what we are.

We are God's children now.

And this is a love we do not have to earn.

James and Isla can't explain the Apostles' Creed or tell us what they believe about the resurrection. They have not read the Bible or attended a theology class. And yet, today, we poured water over them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We spoke God's promises over them and welcomed them into the family of faith. Not because they understand everything, but because God's grace does not wait for understanding. That is the heart of our Lutheran understanding of grace. God acts first. God loves first. God makes promises first.



God acts first.
God loves first.
God makes promises first.
We are God's children now.

Baptism is God's gift. Through water and the word, God promises forgiveness, joins us to Christ's death and resurrection, and welcomes us into a life shaped by grace. James and Isla will grow up in a world that measures people by their achievements, appearance, abilities and success. They will sometimes fail and struggle to believe they are loved. Our calling as a congregation is to help them hear a different story: they belong to God. We teach them this not only through words, but through the way we welcome strangers, care for people who are struggling, and treat one another with compassion. And perhaps, as we celebrate these kids, we will hear again the promise God has made to us. We are God's children now.



All Saints Day invites us to remember those who have gone before us in faith. When we hear the word saint, we might imagine someone extraordinary: someone whose faith never wavered, whose patience was limitless, and whose life was a shining example of Christian goodness. If that is our definition of a

saint, most of us are probably feeling uncomfortable.

But the saints we remember today are ordinary people who have carried the love of God into everyday life. They are the people who taught us to pray, sat beside us when we were grieving, made room for us at their tables, or showed up when life fell apart. Perhaps you remember a grandparent who sang hymns while doing the dishes. A friend who stayed beside you through a difficult season. A teacher or pastor who helped you discover that God was bigger than the narrow picture of God you had been given. These people were not perfect. They had their own struggles and failures. But through their love, courage, humour, generosity and faith, they helped us glimpse something of God. Their lives continue to speak.

That is part of what it means to belong to the communion of saints. We do not walk the journey of faith alone. We are surrounded by those who have gone before us, sustained by those who walk beside us, and joined to those who will come after us. Today, we give thanks for them, while making room for grief.

For some of us, remembering a loved one brings a smile. For others, it brings tears. We may remember a voice, a favourite saying, or an ordinary moment we would give anything to experience again. Our hope doesn't ask us to pretend that death doesn't hurt. Jesus himself wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. We can trust God's promise of resurrection and still ache for those we have lost. We can believe in eternal life and still wish someone were sitting beside us today. But death does not have the last word.

John acknowledges that we do not know everything about the future. He says: "What we will be has not yet been revealed." We cannot explain precisely what eternal life will be

like, but we trust that those who have died are held in the love of the risen Christ. John's words are not only about the saints who have died. They are also about us.

“Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed.”

We are God's children now, but we are not finished yet. Thank goodness!

God is not finished with us, the church, or the world. We live between what is and what will be. We know the promise of God's coming kingdom, but we still see war, injustice, poverty, and loneliness. We know the command to love our neighbours, yet struggle to love people who disagree with us. Sometimes we struggle to love the people sitting in the pew beside us. Sometimes the church fails to embody the love it proclaims. We wound people when we should offer care. We exclude people when we should make room. We defend our own comfort rather than listen to those who have been hurt. Being God's children means acknowledging that these things do happen. And it also means allowing God's love to call us to something better.

John writes that those who hope in Christ seek to become like him. This is not a demand to become perfect before God will love us. It is an invitation to let God's love shape the way we live. Because we are loved, we can learn to love. Because we are forgiven, we can learn to forgive. Because we have been welcomed, we can make room for others. Holiness, saintliness, looks like speaking up when someone is treated unfairly, listening to people whose experiences differ from our own, and admitting when we have caused harm. It looks like sharing what we have, offering hospitality to strangers, and refusing to reduce people to their mistakes or differences. It means speaking of the grace of God in the midst of brokenness and failure. The saints are not people who have escaped the messiness of being human. They are people in whom God's grace has taken hold, often in the middle of that messiness. We are not yet all that we will be. But God's future is already at work among us.

James' and Isla's baptisms today invite us to remember our own baptism. Perhaps you were baptised as a baby and have no memory of the water touching your head. Perhaps you came to baptism later in life. Either way, baptism points us to a promise that



You are God's beloved child.

does not depend on our ability to get everything right. Our deepest identity is not determined by our achievements, failures, wealth, health or the opinions others hold about us. Our deepest identity is this: we belong to Christ. And because we belong to Christ, we belong to one another.

Baptism is not simply a private moment for a family. It is an event for the whole congregation. We promise to nurture these children, teach them the stories of Jesus,

pray for them, and show them what forgiveness, compassion and welcome look like. We won't do this perfectly. But God's promise does not depend on our perfection. When we fail, God's grace remains. When we wander, God's invitation remains. When we doubt, God's promise remains.

So, when life tells you that you are not enough, remember who you are. When grief makes the future feel empty, remember who holds you. When you have failed and cannot see how to begin again, remember that forgiveness is a gift. You are God's beloved child. Not because you've earned it, or because you've always been faithful, but because God has loved you.

On All Saints Day, we celebrate a family larger than we can see. It includes the James and Isla, the people gathered here, and the saints whose names are remembered and those whose names have been forgotten. We are held together not by our goodness or certainty, but by the love of God made known to us in Jesus Christ. And that love reaches across the boundary of death. We cannot see the whole picture yet. We cannot fully imagine what we will become or what the fullness of God's new creation will look like. But John gives us enough to live by. "We are God's children now." And one day, by God's grace, we will see Christ as he is and be made like him.

Until then, we remember the saints who have shown us the way. We care for the children entrusted to us. We keep learning to love one another, welcome those who have been pushed aside, seek justice, practise mercy, and make room for joy. God's love is not a prize waiting at the end of a successful Christian life. It is the beginning, the middle and the end of our life with God. So today, let us give thanks for these children, for the saints who have gone before us, and for the saints sitting beside us now. Let us carry their witness into the world, allowing God's love to shape us into people who reflect the love of Christ. And let us hear these words as if they were spoken directly to us, because they are:

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." Amen.

As we come now to our memorial rite, we pause to remember those we love who have died and to give thanks for the ways their lives have touched ours. Some of us carry fresh grief; others remember loved ones who have been absent for many years. Today, we hold all these memories together, trusting that those who have died are held in the loving arms of God. As we speak their names and remember their lives, may we find comfort in the promise we have heard today: that we are God's children now, and that God's love holds us beyond death. Let us remember with gratitude, grieve with honesty, and hope in the promise of resurrection.

]Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>

