**1 John 3:1-3 November 3, 2019 (All Saints’ Day)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Epistle lesson, 1 John chapter 3 here re-reading these words. “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Who knows you? The real you, the person that you truly are when you scrape everything else away? The person who can be honest with you, who understands you to your very core? Certainly, a stranger couldn’t possibly know the real you by just meeting you or only spending a few hours with you. It’s the same way with co-workers, acquaintances, or even some friends, sure they get to know your likes, your interests, maybe you share some special moments but they never really got to see the “real” you. Best friends and very close friends get to share things with you that bond you together, and we usually think that they know your ins and outs. But what about family? Think about the bond that you have with your parents, your brothers and sisters, or even your grandparents. They have a distinct relationship to you, and those relationships usually are the strongest because there is blood involved. Your parents know you because you come from them. Your parents know you because they see themselves in you. They know what you go through because they have gone through it. The bond of a family is a relationship that few could ever hope to duplicate, there is a closeness that comes from sharing the same blood.

It’s that family closeness that makes a day like All Saints’ Day difficult. While we celebrate together the life that our loved ones now have in the presence of Jesus Christ, especially as we remember our lost brothers and sisters in Christ here at Trinity, as we think of Ron, of Wayne, and of Agnes, there is joy and there still is the reality that they are no longer with us. The bond has been broken, no longer can you share conversations and moments where you both can be your most honest and open selves. It’s the pain of the reality of this world of sin and death. No one lives forever. The loved ones we are surrounded by today could be gone tomorrow, or even later today. There is an uncertainty of when that time will come but we know that as long as we are here, we will eventually die and leave loved ones behind. Our earthly families change, as people come in through births and marriage, but also people leave us through death. We want the people who know us best to stay around forever.

We cling to those who know us because the words of John’s letter couldn’t be more true. “The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” The world doesn’t know us Christians. Even though at times they pretend they do. They go along with the presents and the lights part of Christmas, but it isn’t more than just a festive joyous holiday. Even a holiday like Halloween loses the significance of a mockery of death right before All Saints’ Day. Thanksgiving is nothing more than just a time to eat turkey, an offering up of thanks into the void of the universe because there is no concrete person who gives us those things. The world thinks they understand Christians, but they don’t understand the “real” teachings of Christianity. And so it doesn’t really understand Christ, or His Word and Sacraments, or even the hope and comfort that we have in the midst of death. Instead there’s a continuous stream of questions; Questions that we have been tackling and looking at in the questions and answers section of the most recent release of Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, Questions that you yourself may ask about the core teachings of our faith: How could Christians believe in a real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper? That Jesus Could be both God and Man? That a virgin could give birth? A man could survive in the belly of a fish? That the sea could be parted, that anyone could rise from the dead? That marriage is between a man and a woman? That life begins at conception? And the list goes on and on. The world doesn’t know us, and it never will, because we have a close relationship with our family, we are a reflection of our spiritual, heavenly family, We are God’s own children, which is something that we will gladly and proudly proclaim on a day like today.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called, children of God.” God’s own children, through being baptized into Christ. There is an unbelievable amount of Baptism imagery and language in the texts for All Saints’ Day, whether we realize or catch them or not. Here in 1 John 3 we hear that everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. The washing away or purification of sin was done through Christ and we are made one or united with Christ through His death. This joyous moment is what we celebrate at our Baptism. The glorious saints who stand before the throne worshipping God, this wonderful picture from Revelation 7 which we hear every All Saints’ Day, still speaks of Baptism. For the elder says, “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.” The moment that your dirty, disgusting, black robe of sinful death, is taken upon Christ, and you are washed clean, clothed in the perfect robe of righteousness of Jesus Christ, through His own blood. That’s Baptism. That’s the life you now have in Christ because you are in fact, God’s own child.

God knows you because you have fellowship with him. In the moments of this world where the cloud of sin hangs low, where the darkness seems to seep in at every corner and the sadness and sorrow of the loss of loved ones due to death comes creeping into our hearts, God knows that pain. Jesus knows sorrow, as he wept outside of the tomb of Lazarus, as he understood the gravity of what his death would be by coming to God the Father in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. We are united in fellowship with Jesus who too was tempted as we are yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:15 “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin.” The sorrow that we are faced with in this life, on account of sin, is known and felt by Jesus, who took that sin upon himself to the cross where he died to make us holy. To make us God’s very own, beloved children.

We remember the saints that came before us on a day like today, but since Jesus has made us into His children we are therefore fellow heirs of His kingdom, and made holy, sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ. We remember the saints and follow their lives of example. And we like to image that’s what we are doing as we go about the business of the day. Which kind of puffs us up a bit as we venture out into the world. The thought that we are holier than others or that we now bear this wonderful sign of the cross upon our forehead and our hearts to mark us as ones redeemed by Jesus Christ. But we still remain, children. Mark 10:15 “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Our relationship remains one of obedience to God and His Will, just as a child follows the leadership and direction of their parents. Which brings us back to 4th commandment language in our lives. “Honor Your Father and Mother” which means, we should honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them in the positive, and on the other side we should not despise or anger our parents or other authorities. Think about it in your own life, what makes a parent angry? Certainly disobedience, and not listening which we are very guilty of in our lives as Children of God. We do not heed God’s commands in His Word, we do not follow his clear instructions on refraining from sin but instead do the things that we know we should not do. But another aspect of family is in this relationship. The parent has command over the children. The head of the household calls the shots. We don’t like that idea. As we are children of God and we enjoy the closeness of that relationship, and certainly the perks of the inheritance that is to come, we don’t like the idea that we have to take a backseat to the decisions. And so we rebel, as disobedient children of our heavenly father. We disregard what God has said or make excuses and rationalizations to do whatever we want. We put ourselves in front of God and His blessings and think that we add to our holiness, that it is our actions and that we really are the saints that should be recognized and worshipped. It’s the reality of what our sinful nature does to even something as wonderful as the fact that we are made into God’s children. We turn His wonderful work into an excuse to sin, or to put the spotlight on ourselves.

But our holiness can’t possibly come from ourselves, for nothing in us is holy. We were born into sin, we live surrounded by sin, our lives are corrupted to sin and inclined to sin. We aren’t worthy of being God’s children, which is why John describes this adoption into God’s family as nothing more than love. “see what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.” And the next words that he uses describe how this isn’t just lip service, how this isn’t just a title. “And so we are” he says. We aren’t just second rate children of our Heavenly Father, but we share in the glory and love of the Father. “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.” The glory that waits for us has not yet appeared, for we remain in this sinful world and remain sinners. We know that God has made us holy and so we wait to see the glory that our loved ones have experienced in going to be with him. We joyously wait, here as we get closer to the end of the Church Year, to the coming of Christ, for His triumphant return will mean that we will leave a world that doesn’t know us, and a life that is tainted by sin. And then we shall see him in his glory and be in his presence for all eternity.

Then we shall be in his house, around His throne and altar, crying the same words that our loved ones are saying right at this moment. “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb”. We don’t need to fear for those in our family who have gone before us, for we are all made into one family with God our Heavenly Father, and we will see them again. We will see them in glory, as we too will be exalted to be in God’s presence. Until that day, we enjoy the closeness of our earthly families, we come together in fellowship with our Church family, as brothers and sisters in Christ, and we serve the Lord in gladness, as His children, following His lead, and hearing His Word, as we then go out into this world set apart by God, made holy by God, in the knowledge that we are loved, and we are His Children.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.