

Now and Not Yet

All Saint's Day; Series C

1 John 3:1-3

We all have been asked this question at various times in our lives: "What do you want to be/do when you grow up?" While my siblings and I were growing up my mother purchased personal memory books for us to help us document each year of our Elementary School period. There was a space on the inside cover of each of these books to paste a wallet-sized school picture from that year. Within the pages of each book there was room to put school schoolwork samples and report cards. Throughout the book there were pages filled with "fill-in-the-blank" statements: My favorite food was _____; My best friends were _____; My favorite hobbies were _____. The questions often varied depending on the year of Elementary School that the book was intending to document. Without fail, regardless of the edition of the Memory Book, there was always this "fill-in-the-blank" statement waiting to be filled in: When I grow up I want to be a/an _____.

What do you want to be when you grow up? Every now and then I take those memory books off the shelf and look at what I wrote in them or what I told my mom to write in them. Particularly, I enjoy reading how I finished that statement: When I grow up I want to be a/an _____. The answer was always different. Within the span of five or six years, I changed my mind every single year. It was the same for you, was it not? In Kindergarten maybe you wanted to be a teacher because you absolutely loved your teacher. In first grade perhaps you wanted to be a cowboy or a cowgirl because you loved your cowboy/cowgirl hat and boots. What was written in those blanks changed for me from year to year because my interests and hobbies changed and because the people that were influential in my life changed.

Regardless of the changing circumstances around us and regardless of the changes that our own bodies go through in life, this fact remains: We all are someone *now*. We are all someone in the present. We all have an identity *now*. What we do with the majority of our time and the people with whom we spend the majority of our time often shapes that identity. But this truth also remains: We are all *on our way* to somewhere else—to *being something or someone else* (Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs, "1 Jn 3:1-3 Chapel Sermon" at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO). The people with whom we spend time and the things we do with that time help to shape *where we will be going*. Also, the external circumstances and events that are out of our immediate control help to shape where we will be going—personal and family health issues, employment status, and the state of the economy to name a few. We are all are somebody now, today, in the present even as we are becoming somebody.

So who are you now? That is an appropriate question to consider on this day that we celebrate All Saint's Day. We remember this day that we are the *living* saints of God, living our lives in Christ here in this world. Also on this day we remember the saints of God who have *died* in the faith and are resting at peace with God. We particularly remember Lena, Genevieve, and Chuck, those connected with Atonement Lutheran Church. We remember who we are now and who they are now as saints of God.

To help us in remembering who we are now as saints of God, we sang the first six verses of that hymn, "For All the Saints" (LSB 677). In the first verse we remembered those saints that have *died in the faith*: "For All the saints who from

their labors rest, who thee by faith before the world confessed, thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!" In the third verse we remembered the saints, like you and I, the saints who are *now living*: "Oh, may thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold, fight as the saints who nobly fought of old and win with them the victor's crown of gold! Alleluia! Alleluia!" Who are we now? We are the *living saints* of God living in Christ here in this world. Who are our friends and relatives who have died in the faith now? Where are they now? They are the saints of God who have died in the faith. They are resting from their labors. They are with Christ. As the fourth verse of our Sermon hymn reminded us, "Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine! We feebly struggle, they in glory shine; Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine. Alleluia! Alleluia!"

Our second reading from the first letter of the Apostle John also reminded us who we are *now*. He writes to the Christians in Asia Minor in order to encourage them in the midst of times of intense persecution to resist false teachers and teachings that attempt to lead them to put their trust in someone other than Christ and the teachings of the Christian faith founded on God's Word. The Apostle John writes to encourage the Christians in Asia Minor in the midst of some intense persecution. In order to achieve his goal of encouraging the Christians he reminds them *who they are now*. We heard his words this morning, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are . . ." (1 Jn 3:1). The Apostle John knows something important and he wants the Christians of Asia Minor to remember it, as Christians we are all not only saints of God but we are the children of God—*now*!

Last week we celebrated the Reformation. We remembered the courage that God gave Martin Luther to stand for the truth of God—*Here I stand! I can do no other*. As we considered Jesus' words last week in the Gospel reading, we recalled that truth that as saints of God we are the children of God. We were encouraged to live boldly as the children of God and make it our resolve to say confidently, "*Here I stay*—in the household of God as his child." By the grace of God you and I are baptized as the children of God. In baptism you and I are adopted as sons and daughters of God in Christ. Through the Son we enter into the household of the Heavenly Father as sons and daughters. That is who you are, *now*.

So who will you be? Even as you are someone now, you are all on our way to being someone and somebody. Who will you become? As the saints of God, the children of God, you all are *not yet* somebody that you will someday be. In his letter of encouragement to the Christians of Asia Minor, the Apostle John also had something to say about this future, *not yet* identity of all Christians. We heard it this morning, "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. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 Jn 3:2-3).

As children of God *now* you and I have entered into the household of God through the Son. As the baptized children of God, the Spirit of God is also working within us to bring about a greater family resemblance. We are being conformed more and more to the image of God's Son in our words, thoughts, actions, and deeds (Ro 8:29). As we continue as faithful hearers of our Father's Word the Spirit works to form us into more faithful doers of his Word. As we continue to faithfully ask for and live in our Father's forgiveness through Christ, we grow as the forgiven children of God. As we continue faithfully to participate in the Lord's Supper that our Father feeds to his children, we become strengthened and nourished. In these ways we live faithfully as the children of God *now* and become conformed more and more to the image and faithfulness of our Father's firstborn Son. It is our hope that we become more pure as he is pure. That we become righteous as he is righteous. That we grow to love as he loves.

We live as the children of God now and grow to become more like the image of our Heavenly Father's firstborn Son. We live this way as we await "that yet more glorious day" (LSB 677, vs. 7). We sang that hymn, "For All the Saints" right before the sermon. I am sure most of you noticed that we did not sing the last two stanzas. That was intentional. We have been speaking about "the *now*" as the children of God. We have been talking about who we are in the present. We started to speak about the "*not yet*," who we will become as the children of God, the saints of God. This is what the seventh and eighth verses speak about. The writer says, "But lo, there breaks a *yet more glorious day*; the saints triumphant rise in bright array; the King of Glory passes on his way. Alleluia! Alleluia!" (LSB 677, vs. 7, emphasis, mine). This is what the Apostle John points us to in our reading, "But we know that *when he appears* we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2, emphasis, mine).

Our full biblical hope as the saints of God, the children of God is the return of Christ and the eternal life we will have with him and all the saints upon his return. Then, we will be fully formed as his holy children of God, restored fully to the image of God once again. So what do you want to be when you grow up? I want to be like the Son. Amen.