

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
All Saints' Day (observed)
November 7, 2021
Rev. 7:9-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt. 5:1-12

The Present and Future Children of God

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2 ESV)

Dearly Beloved Children of God,

Most often, a review of a book or a movie tries not to reveal the end of the story or warns of a "spoiler alert" if it does. After all, the purpose of the story is to build and maintain suspense until it is resolved in the end. Today, we get a spoiler of sorts as we see the end that awaits the children of God and see how things work out.

Now, if you could see into the future, what difference would it make in your life now? Would you change what you do now if you knew it had undesirable outcomes for yourself, your children, or others? What if that future showed something so magnificent you wouldn't want to miss it for anything? Would that make any difference in your life? As we celebrate All Saints' Day, we get such a glimpse into the future, and we see what it does for us in the present.

St. John gives us a glimpse into the future for the children of God. He presents a spectacular view of "a great multitude . . . standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev. 7:9-10). This is the eternal song of victory for the children of God. These are joined by the angels and the elders and the four living creatures in worship of God. Then John is told that those in white robes are the ones coming out of the great tribulation, and that their robes have been washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. These are the children of God who remained faithful to the end, even in the midst of suffering and trials and persecutions in this life. They are forever in the presence of the Lamb and He will protect them from all things harmful. For them there is no more suffering or pain or tears. What a beautiful picture! And, by God's grace in Christ, that's your future.

Yet, dear friends, it's also your present. For St. John tells us that "we are God's children now." Did you hear that? "We are God's children now." That means that that glorious scene from heaven is yours now. And that makes all the difference in your life and how you live.

So, Beloved, don't think it trivial or unimportant to be a child of God. For there was time when you were not His child. There was a time you were dead in trespasses and sins. There was a time when you "walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." There was a time when "we

all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.” There was a time when we “were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Eph. 2:1-3). There was a time when we were enemies of God because we wished to be a friend of the world (James 4:4).

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . . and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 4:4-7). That’s what it means to be a child of God - now.

And as the children of God, we are blessed. Blessed beyond measure. We are blessed because Christ the Lamb of God died for us, because He took our place under the wrath of God, because He suffered the punishment we deserve. We who are poor in spirit, who have nothing to offer to God and can make no claims on Him for ourselves, are blessed because our life and salvation rests solely in Jesus. After all, we know that “all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment, [or filthy rags]. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” (Is. 64:6). “Nothing in my hand I bring.” We are blessed to know Christ who “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” (2 Cor. 8:9). Yes, to be a child of God, to be blessed, is to be in a condition of having God’s favor and receiving good from Him. And such a condition comes only from God Himself.

We are blessed because God comforts us when we mourn. He comforts us when our loved ones die and depart this world. And His comfort is seen most clearly in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus. In that blessed event, He shows to us that all who die in Christ will also rise with Him. And that’s what we celebrate on this Feast of All Saints. Those who have died in the Lord live with Him, even as they await the resurrection of the flesh on the Last Day. And while that seems to lie in the future, it is a present reality, but we don’t see it yet. But we certainly have the certainty that “when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” That’s the blessed hope of a child of God.

We are blessed because God promises the new heaven and the new earth to those who are His, to those who know their beggarliness, and trust in Christ Jesus alone. Indeed, such a realization allows for no boasting in ourselves, but only in the cross of Christ.

We are blessed because God fulfills our deepest needs. When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we yearn for that which only God can give. And what is that? Forgiveness, life, and salvation. That’s what He gives us in the Word and Sacraments, especially the Lord’s Supper. He gives us to eat and to drink that which fills and satisfies a hungry and thirsty soul.

We are blessed because we have received mercy. God does not give us what we deserve. Instead, He gives us mercy. He forgives our sins and removes them from us. He clothes us with robes which have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. He gives us a seat at His banquet table and serves us with the food of eternal life.

We are blessed because He creates a pure heart in us. And with such purified hearts, we shall see God. That's His promise. He purifies our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ and through the Holy Sacraments by which He forgives sins and bestows His righteousness.

We are blessed because God has made peace with us. He sent His only-begotten Son to establish that peace by the shedding of His holy, precious blood. In that sacrifice of the Lamb of God, God's wrath has been appeased and His justice satisfied. We who were His enemies are now His children. And how can we not proclaim that peace to all we meet?

We are blessed because we suffer abuse from the world and the devil. As the prophets and apostles were so persecuted and abused, so we too can expect to suffer for the sake of Christ. If the world so treated Christ, how blessed are we when we are treated as Christ was. After all, we are not greater than our Teacher, our Savior. And yet, our Lord promises to be with us and to sustain us through all these tribulations. That's why we can rejoice and be glad even in the midst of suffering and persecution, just as the apostles did when they were beaten for preaching Christ (Acts 5:41). We are the children of God now, and we look forward to wearing a white robe and waving palm branches before the throne of heaven. Yes, we are most blessed indeed.

So how does that future and present blessedness show itself in our lives? We live as His children by repenting of our sin and striving to avoid willful and deliberate sin. We don't presume to be a child of God and remain in our sin, living as the world does. Instead, we repent and eagerly come to His House each week to receive from Him His gifts which nourish us in the one, true, saving faith. And as we receive those gifts, as we respond in repentance and faith, singing His praises, we rehearse what we will do for eternity. Thus, this is our highest priority. We wouldn't miss it for anything. For it is a preview of our eternal inheritance.

Yes, Beloved, we are children of God now. Ponder that and rejoice in it. And while we don't yet see the full reality of that divine truth, we trust in His Word, knowing that all who trust in Him will never be put to shame. Because we are children of God now, we look forward to spending eternity with all the saints singing: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." (Rev. 7:10, 12).

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener