

The Hope of the Children of God

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Children of God; Hope; Jesus / 1 John 3:1–3

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hope is one thing that we all need, especially in these days where we are just sick of this Pandemic and the Public Health Procedures! We are also tired of the election hype and the politicians offering us “hope.” We know where hope comes from. On this festival day, this Feast of All Saints, I pray that it would bring great comfort to you who have lost loved ones to death. We all have whether it’s been in the last 12 months or at any point in our lives. Comfort comes through the promise that what to the world appears to be a loss becomes a transition for the Christian. John reminded his readers that the world will bring trouble, but those who are children of God have received the promised hope that death has already been emptied of its power. We do have hope! And we have it in the one who did what it took to make us children of God:

Our hope as God’s Children in Jesus!

Our hope is always under attack by worldly, sinful, and satanic lies.

First our hope is attacked by the world. At the time of John’s writing, the church continued to suffer attacks from both Jewish and Gentile religions. Many apostles had been martyred by this time. Still to this day, many Christians around the world are martyred. We in the United States have seen only nominal threat. But it appears the future could bring greater hostility to the church...and it seems like each day the threat gets bigger, and with it, an eroding of our hope.

Besides open persecution, secular forces have eroded confidence in the biblical narratives through higher criticism and a denial of the miracles presented in Scripture - such as the Virgin birth, miraculous healings, exorcisms, Jesus’ resurrection, life after death, and divine creation. And always, death, disease, and suffering surround us. Some of us have even lost loved ones this past year. It can all cause a continual degeneration of the hope that we have toward the world—and sometime even toward the promises of God.

Second, our hope is attacked by our own sinful condition. No matter how hard we try to cling to the promises of God and the hope such promises bring, we may continue to find ourselves

questioning whether such promises could really be for us. We recognize our sin, and we question, “Can God really forgive what I’ve done, thought, or said?” We even question where God is at times. “There’s so much junk going on in the world, in my life, Is God really active? Where is God found?”

Finally, our hope is constantly under attack by the devil and his demons. The devil is the accuser who will not let our sin go unchallenged. The devil seeks to separate us from the promises of God and lead us to despair. The question he put to Eve in the garden still haunts us today: “Did God actually say?”

The world and our sinful condition continue to tell us lies that we so often believe. The devil then uses such lies to cause a questioning of God’s promises and the hope that we have in Christ Jesus.

But the truth is, we are children of God; yes, in Jesus, so we are! All Christians face spiritual weaknesses. Including me! It is important to recognize this. Too often, Christians fail to share their weaknesses with one-another leading to self-doubt: “Why do I struggle so much while other Christians seem to be doing so well? Am I really a child of God?” I know that many of you are struggling right now, I am too. This has been the hardest 7 1/2 months of my pastoral ministry. My goal was to find ways to keep us connected and engaged and I often times wonder, have I failed. My goal has been to feed you with the Word of God and I question: Have I failed? I see so many churches connecting even in the age of physical distancing and I question, why am I struggling with it? It is hard for me to admit this, but even as a pastor I have my own spiritual weaknesses. Even as you struggle alongside of me I ask that you follow the Call to carry one another’s burdens and I will do the same as we support and encourage one another in faith.

Instead of looking internally for our hope, we must look to the truth of who we are in Jesus Christ. Hope that is self-applied will always fail us. Real hope can never be found inside ourselves or in the conditions we observe in our lives. The only hope that is guaranteed is the hope that sees what’s been done completely outside ourselves, completely for us: That is, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Only in Jesus, through the eyes of faith, will we really retain the hope that sustains us.

And here’s what the eyes of faith see:

Lutheran Service Book Three Year Lectionary All Saints’ Day

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

The “eyes of faith” are really ears of faith that simply hear and believe what God says: “Children of God; and so we are.”

And yes, what love the Father has given!—not deserved or earned...but lavished upon us without any merit or worthiness in us. It is a love we've received, a pure gift from our Father in heaven.

We are children of God! God the Father has called us through His Son, Jesus Christ. We have been incorporated into the family of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through the Word and water of Holy Baptism. You were given life there!

True, though, "the world does not know us." When things go badly, enemies attack us, we may think that means we are not children of God. But John reminds us how the world treated Jesus: rejection, torture, death. If the world has treated Jesus in such a way, the children of God shouldn't expect any better. And amid such suffering, John reminds us to look to the resurrection of Jesus.

Lutheran Service Book Three Year Lectionary All Saints' Day

See what kind of love the Father has given to us,

The love that we have received is a pure gift from our Father in heaven through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. Therefore, we are children of GOD!

And therefore, in Jesus, here is our hope!

We have the hope that, beyond this life, we shall be like Jesus. One of these days Jesus is going to appear again, in glory, coming back from His Father's right hand for all to see. We don't know everything about that day or what will be like afterward. We don't even know when it will be. But we do know that our bodies will be raised, and that our bodies and the bodies of all the saints—our loved ones who have died in Christ including Dorothy Fagerlin, Maxine Christianson, James Perala, Elaine Papenfuss, Karen Varnam, Albert Klug, Kenneth Miller, and Eugene Hermann—will be glorified, like his glorious body, to live together with him forever.

This is certain, because our hope is founded on the reality of Jesus' incarnation and divinity and on the fact that he completed everything that was incomplete within us. He entered our stead and became a sinner for us. He carried our sin to the cross and to death, so that in his resurrection the sin, death, and the devil that clings so easily to us would be removed and we would be purified. Our purity is based solely on the righteousness of Christ. Our purity is based on the fact that the blood of Jesus washes us clean and our robes are made white.

While we continue to sin in this life, Jesus continues to cover our sin with his death and resurrection. Jesus has completed the work of our salvation through his ministry. Yet our forgiveness is not only a historical promise. Through the Divine Service, Jesus continues to deliver the forgiveness. You received it once already today. Such forgiveness empties us of the lies from the devil, the world, and our doubts.

John will not let us forget who we are in Christ. Jesus' forgiveness is a perfect apart from anything within us. This is the hope we have received as children of God. It is a hope that sustains because of Jesus' righteousness.

Such a message offers great comfort as we remember those who have died in the faith. As Lutherans, we understand that we don't focus on the spiritual power or piety of those who have died. We know there's nothing laudable in any of us before a righteous and perfect God. But we rejoice that those we love are with Jesus, awaiting the glorious day when we shall all gather before the throne of God. The promise of Scripture is for all of God's Children...which includes you.

Lutheran Service Book Three Year Lectionary All Saints' Day

15 "Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.
16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.
17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Let us go forth today and every day knowing that our salvation, forgiveness, and hope are built on this promise that will never fail us. For we are in Jesus, because He is in us and was first in us. Death has been defeated by His death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave...it will ultimately be defeated when he comes back and raises us from our graves. We are incorporated into this promise through the holy waters of Baptism. We will live even though we die.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.