

All Saints' Day  
November 5, 2023  
*Seeing Him as He is!*  
1 John 3:1-3

There comes a time in every pastor's career when it gets hard to do funerals. Usually it is somewhere between 15 and 20 years at any given parish. And, the reason it's hard is because you have lived with God's people, you have gone through major tragedies and hard times in the congregation together, and you get to know people like you have never known anyone before. It is hard to describe to someone who has not had that consistent time with the same group of people over the long term.

In a transient society most people never get this experience. Homes are sold and people move to where the jobs are. People grow older and move back to be with the family they have lived apart from for decades. Some are just traveling through life and communities looking for the next big thing. I've seen it all, and I have been a part of it all. Having lived in New Jersey, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Colorado, Missouri, South Carolina, Tennessee, and now two different places in Florida over 23 years, I can totally relate to that transient life.

But now, Marcy and I have been settled here longer than anywhere in our lives as adults. Our perspective is changing. I have gotten to know my community and the people that live in it, and the church and the members here, like I have never known anyone besides my family. So, now when I do a funeral, I am not saying goodbye to someone I served for a few years and off to heaven you go. No, I am saying goodbye to someone completely different than I have before.

Celebrating the Saints that have passed this year: I've said goodbye to that stately woman that never, and I mean never, (I verified this with her family) ever had a frown on her face. She was in church every Sunday and every Bible study she could make, too! A picture of her, Marcy and me still sits on my desk reminding me of that every day.

I said goodbye to men who wrote the policies for our employees and brilliantly crafted a ministry that is truly lay-run and equipped for the saints. But, at the same time they said the most side-splitting funny things I have ever heard in Bible study fellowship events.

I said goodbye to men that were kicked out of their homes, thanks to administrative snafus in their former church-sponsored retirement community, who found refuge in our community and church. Hurt by what happened before, but worked through it with me and Faith Lutheran church, they became our most supportive members in the darkest and most painful times we have ever had in the ministry.

I said goodbye to grandparents that made sure their grandchildren came to school here, got baptized here, and then they themselves wanted to be buried right here.

I said goodbye to women who brought huge celebrations to the congregation that commemorated patriotism with our congressman present, and love of the freedom we have to worship right here without the fear of persecution for doing so.

I said goodbye to real Nebraskans, daughters of Pastors, matriarchal mothers, and beloved brothers.

And most recently I said goodbye to a member that I could barely get through the sermon, because it was in the preaching of it, in front of his family, that I finally understood what I wrote. It described just how much he really cared for the children at our school!

People we really knew, people we really loved, and, thank God, people we will see again. Because it's not our love for them or their love for us that makes them who they are in eternity, rather it's God's Love.

Today in our Epistle we know exactly what kind of love that is, because John the Elder told us so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And a close look at this love today has nothing to do with what it is, rather it has everything to do with what it does. Love that has the purpose for Jesus to give up His life, which is exactly what makes us all God's children.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, as the case may be, sometimes it is nice to be a part of the wider audience - go with the flow, walk, talk, and be like everyone else. There is a relative comfort zone I think we all yearn for, but the problem is, as Christians redeemed and sanctified by Christ, we're going to stand out whether we like it or not. Hopefully, it is for the better, but that may not always be the case and we should not expect it to be so anyway.

The best example I saw of this was the recent election of the Speaker of the House. I would be willing to bet that most of you, like me, really didn't care much about who the house speaker was - until we found out who the house speaker officially would BE! It is what it is, and it will be what it will be...no sense wasting any energy watching the news until we know for sure who it is. Well, we finally got one and it's Mike Johnson from Louisiana. Yah, I said the very same thing when they finally elected him, "Whose Mike Johnson?"

Well, I found out last week when he said, "If you want to know anything about me, read your Bible...that's my world view." I know there is more to him than that, but I would like to focus

on that one statement. It raised the eyebrows of MSNBC Commentator Jen Psaki who made the distinction that he didn't say *he drew his world view from the Bible, but rather, is it his world view*, and that was concerning to her.

That right there, in a nutshell, is what makes us different. We don't live in a world advised by the Bible, rather the Bible IS OUR WORLD. And that is exactly why it is hard for the world to understand us. While we are *in this world*, we are clearly not *of this world*.

But as our text says today, even that is just a foretaste of the feast to come! Are we perfect in any way, shape, or form? NO WAY, not even close. In fact, you all know that is who I am, as well. Just last Sunday at Trunk or Treat I wore my "Sin Boldly t-shirt that says "but trust God's forgiveness more boldly" in fine print. Patti Albright came up to me and asked me what I was going as, for Halloween, and I gestured to my shirt, saying, "I'm going as a sinner, can't you see what my shirt says?" To which Patty shot back, "You don't need a shirt to pull that off, Pastor!" Touché, Patti, touché!!!

And that's another difference between us and the world. We don't make any effort to justify our sin. We don't try to make our sins acceptable, we don't even try to hide our sins; rather, we confess our sins and embrace the reality that we are sinners who need our Savior Jesus!

And that's what we need to tell the world. We are no different than you!!! We are all sinners in this together and we have a Savior from that sin. In fact, our Savior loves us so much He laid down His life on the cross, which paid for every sin we ever committed and every sin we will ever commit! Then, through the work of the Holy Spirit, through the Word and Sacraments, He comes to us from outside of us; making His dwelling in us to get to others who don't know Him and believe in Him like we do.

We want to tell everyone who does not know Him, now, before it's too late; because we are getting closer and closer to the time when what we will be, has not yet appeared. But we will know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.

Unfortunately, for anyone who does not know Him, it will be too late.

Years ago, a missionary went to South America to share the Gospel with a tribe that had never see outsiders. They were a violent people to outsiders, which caused everyone to stay away. But this missionary and bush pilot was determined to share the Gospel with them.

After some clever tricks using the plane to slowly expose themselves to the tribe, and leaving gifts of food, tools, and other valuable instruments in the jungle, they managed to coordinate a

successful face-to-face meeting with the tribe. It went very well, except with one male member of the tribe who remained standoffish and visibly irritated at their presence. Eventually, his passive irritation turned to open opposition, and one day, in a fit of rage, he murdered the missionary.

Sometime later, the wife of the missionary and her children reached out to the tribe again in an extraordinary display of forgiveness that was not lost on the tribal members. Then, they even forgave and personally befriended the man who murdered their husband and father, the missionary bush pilot. The man was so overwhelmed by their forgiveness, he felt compelled to tell them what he saw that one fated day. As he recounted the event leading up to the moment he ended the missionary's life, he shared that something extraordinary happened the moment he saw the missionary's life leech from his eyes. The man described it as going to the great boia, the typical way the natives described leaving this life. But, what he described was blinding light, a vision of a man that welcomed the missionary in light, and the missionary himself taking on that light and joining the man in the sky. Truly, for that missionary, when Jesus appeared at his death, he was indeed like Him because he saw his Savior Jesus as He is!

For my All-Saints Children's message I showed a lot of pictures in a photo album, all those people I learned from in their own way about what it means to be a Christian. Nobody is perfect, none of us are, but they were still there to form me in one way or another into who I am today and who I will be in God's eyes for the future. But it was never because of who they were, it was because of what THEY did. They took me to Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. They sat with me every Sunday in church. They shared family devotions with my brother and me as a kid all the way to adulthood. They cared enough about me, to give me the only thing that really matters in this world, Jesus, who was their Savior too!

It's not about them looking down on us from Heaven. We have no evidence from scripture that they can. Furthermore, why would they want to see our pain and suffering still on earth? That wouldn't be heaven at all. Rather, it's looking at the lives they led through the power of the Holy Spirit by example in Christ. And ultimately, that's always what God did. He gave us this world to live in, but we ruined it. Then, He redeemed the world from our sin. He gave us the message we need to give to those who do not know Him yet. And now He gives us what we need to live in Him until Jesus returns to take us home, when we will truly be as He is, seeing Him as He is! AMEN

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