

Dearly Beloved ☩ We Are

☩ Children of God (v.1)

☩ Known, yet unknown (v.2)

☩ Purified by hope (v.3)

In the name of Jesus, our Brother, dear children of the heavenly Father:

The newsletter of a church in San Diego, CA, came across my desk. The first page said, “Christ Is Risen!” – then clearly proclaimed the joy and hope of Easter. You know how I love the joy and hope of Easter. Pastor Harvey G. Throop wrote “An Easter Message from the Pastor” on pages 2,3. He was especially encouraging the members to attend Holy Week services – Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and both Easter services. But then he admitted he was not sure that he could attend. He has undergone radiation and chemotherapy for esophageal cancer. He lost his appetite and suffers from a persistent cough that keeps him from even talking on the phone to members. Joyfully he thanks them for their cards, letters and emails. Quoting today’s Psalm 23, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,” he adds, “To those words of assurance I place my trust! Your continued prayers will be deeply appreciated. – Harvey.” Later on page 7, is an encouragement to the members: “Support our Throops.” And in the second column, thanks for a prayer quilt from the family of 6-year-old Jacob Arhens. He was diagnosed with brain cancer before Christmas and “passed away” in February.

Dear sheep of the Good Shepherd, do you see why we need God’s constant reassurance? **Dearly Beloved – We Are.** Sometimes we don’t feel like it, but **We Are Dearly Beloved...**

☩ Children of God (v.1)

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” Do you remember when that happened? Most of us were too young. My wife does not believe me when I tell her I remember my Baptism. Maybe it is only my imagination since it happened on August 4, 1957, less than two weeks after my first birth. Witnesses saw when I was *“born again...of water and the Spirit.”* (John 3:5f) The Spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15) put God’s Name on me in Word-powered water. Now I am forever “God’s own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ!” (CWS 737)

Does it matter how the water was applied? Or what kind of water was used? Or that my father performed the Baptism? With our wooden font the ushers once forgot to empty the bowl. A few weeks later? Not pleasant. Our WELS mission in Rochester, MN, Life Lutheran Church, has a font with “living water.” A member designed it around an idea for a small fountain with a beautiful water plume. They still must use filtered water to keep it pleasant. But that font makes a great illustration of how the Father’s love is *“lavished on us.”* God does not tell us whether to sprinkle, pour or immerse. But God does not bless with an eyedropper either. God *“lavished”* His love on us like a water fountain. On hot summer days working on my Granddad’s ranch, a good soaking with the hose felt great. **Children of God**, we are soaked with God’s love in Christ Jesus His Son!

Good thing too! Because, **Children of God**, cancer strikes. Death comes. *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (Romans 6:23) Your life looks like everyone else’s with a few extra problems. But the world does not like what they see. The high and mighty look down on Christians. One scholar minced no words: “To ordinary archaeologists, Biblical archaeologists are lowlife.”¹ “Pond scum” we are – to the rich and famous. They feel no need for God or His goodness in their life. So when we don’t feel God’s love, are we just *“called” Children of God?*

¹ Peter Lemche, professor of Biblical studies, University of Copenhagen, renowned minimalist, in *BAR*, May/June, 2012, p. 20.

✦ **Known, yet unknown (v.2)**

“No!” the Lord’s Apostle John asserts: **Children of God “is what we are!”** No need for the world’s endorsement. Our feelings lie; God always cares. Think of a sheep that wandered away, back to the same old ruts. Feels so good to roll, but dirty wool is heavy, and all too soon, oops! Can’t roll back. That’s called a “cast” sheep. Belly skyward, sun stroke can kill him, cold air can freeze him, or wolves can eat him if the shepherd does not find him fast. See why the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 to go and search for that one lost sheep? The world hasn’t a care, but that Shepherd has just one: Find his “cast” sheep before it’s too late. **“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why so disquieted within me? Put your hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, my Savior and my God!”** (Psalm 42:5) One shepherd liked to carry a bottle of brandy and water. Great for warming up cold sheep. Little lambs wiggled their tiny tails with delight. **Dearly Beloved**, your Good Shepherd would not rest until laid down His life for you on the cross. On Easter He took it up again. He feeds your soul on Word and sacrament – better than brandy.

“The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” Dearly Beloved, “now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Safe with God – **Known, yet unknown.**

See why we need these Sundays after Easter? Crucified with Christ, we are also raised to be like Him. Remember those two disciples with an **unknown** man walking beside them? Believers are often **unknown** like that. In His glorified body Jesus made Himself **known** by breaking bread. Jesus ate, but not out of necessity; He **“cannot die again.”** (Romans 6:9) Jesus in His Revelation to John shines in golden glory that will also light up His saints in glory. **“By the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, [Jesus] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”** (Philippians 3:21) Daniel prophesied: **“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”** (Daniel 12:3)

✦ **Purified by hope (v.3)**

So how do you act when you have such **hope** inside? People do strange things for earthly “hope.” Millions buy the lottery, yet odds are better to find a winning ticket. Some of you have heard about that high school graduate awakened by a phone call on Saturday morning. Her boss at the bakery gave her a raffle ticket. She won! The local priest did not sound happy when she said she was enrolled at Dr. Martin Luther College. The sale of her brand new ’77 Olds Cutlass Supreme paid much of her tuition, but only after she managed to find the ticket in her dresser drawer and her brother drove her to claim her car.

Dearly Beloved, our hopes are so much higher than cars that rust out, homes that wear out and bodies that waste away. David, **Purified by hope** wrote: **“And I – in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.”** (Psalm 17:15) Paul, **Purified by hope**: **“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”** (2 Corinthians 3:18) **Purified by hope**: **“Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life....”** (Philippians 2:14-16) That’s what John meant in our last verse: **“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as [Jesus] is pure.”**

If Publishers’ Clearing House said you won, would you change your life? If you had to put a sign in your yard for “P.C.H.” – would hope of winning do it? Priceless is our hope of everlasting life! “Hope brings joy to your soul. You don’t live in the past with bitterness and regrets; you are looking forward because you have an incredible future. No matter how rough life may be right now, someday soon you’re going to be pain-free and celebrating in everlasting glory. Hope is how you face surgery or tough it out in a difficult work situation. *Hope is where your heart is when your body is limping along.*”² **Dearly Beloved ✦ Children of God, Known, yet unknown, Purified by hope**, let it shine! Amen.

² Pastor Daron Lindemann, *PREACH THE WORD* – January / February 2007, p. 2. Emphasis mine.