

Dearly Loved Saints¹

✦ Still children here.... (v.1)

✦ What we will be....? (vv.2-3)

In the Name of Jesus whose holiness makes us saints by faith, dearly loved children of God:

This TIME IN BETWEEN Christ's first and second coming, do you ever find yourself wondering where to begin with someone? By listening and asking questions you find where people are hurting. Then you can help as God gives you the words according to His promise. In John's day as the Lord's last surviving apostle, false teachers were telling Christians they could not be sure they were God's children unless they accepted the superior knowledge of these imposters. Ancient Gnosticism is now called Scientism, promising knowledge without God. Any surprise these self-proclaimed experts insist on teaching other people's children to question their gender identity? A cancerous mass of medical, social engineers want to impress everyone with their opinions forsaking science. Lawsuits aim to enforce their personal (im)morality on everyone else. But with the heart of Christ you can see the hurt behind gender identity confusion. You can share what you believe: *I am so grateful that God created us male and female. From God's Word, the Bible, we learn to appreciate differences in our strengths and weaknesses to help each other – boys and girls, men and women together.* God unites us with Himself through Christ Jesus as God's own, **Dearly Loved Saints**. This TIME IN BETWEEN we are...

✦ Still children here.... (v.1)

The Roman Papacy claims the right to canonize those they call "saints" as defined by their work-righteousness. As we celebrate All Saints' Day, we're reminded that the Word of God, the Bible, calls "**saints**" in God's eyes, souls that are covered with Christ's holiness by faith. There is no purging place (*purgatory*) in the Bible. When someone dies, the Holy Spirit tells us, "***The dust (body) returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.***" (Ecclesiastes 12:7) Jesus assured the criminal dying on the cross next to Him, "***Amen I tell you: Today you will be with me in paradise.***" (Luke 23:43 EHV) The Holy Spirit takes us to ***paradise*** in today's First Reading from Revelation 7:9-17.

One of the things I love about the God of the Bible is how Father, Son, and Holy Spirit help us see who we are here and now. We could not know the awesome wonder of this except that God the Holy Spirit tells us through John the Apostle: "***See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are! The world does not know us, because it did not know him.***"

By nature we were all sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, separated from God and each other by our sin. The wrong things we say and do, and the good we fail to say and do – not by human standards, but by God's standards – sins of omission and sins of commission would kill us in time and eternity. But God did not want us to stay estranged from Him or each other. The ***love the Father lavished on us*** (NIV84) is pictured in the Word powered water of Baptism, commanded by Christ, especially when it's drenched on the forehead of a child or on an adult ***in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*** (Matthew 28:18-20) In your Baptism, God put His Name on you to adopt you into His family. No matter what your earthly family looks like or even if you don't have one, you are loved by God the Father who gives you faith in Jesus His Son by Baptism and the Word creating faith. Just don't expect any praise from fellow humans on the outside looking in. They don't know the saints of God because they don't know God's Son. By name, yes, but not by the experience of faith in Jesus' loving kindness.

¹ 2023 WELS Worship Foundations series: *THE TIME IN BETWEEN: A Time to Focus on Future Glory.*

“Children of God...that is what we are!” So, be patient with yourself and each other. We are **Dearly Loved Saints** in God’s eyes, but we’re still trying ***“to live up to what we have already attained”*** (Philippians 3:16 NIV) by faith in Jesus. As God’s children we all grow up at different speeds in various areas of our lives. It’s one of the things I really appreciate about being a pastor in a Christian congregation. In areas where I am weak in my sanctification, there are always believing brothers and sisters of all ages to help me out and sometimes to help me up when I fall. You children should know how encouraging it is to see you in Sunday School, worshiping in God’s house. Sunday School teachers and parents, our Elders and my fellow pastor, New Life Women of Faith and Board for Lay Ministry, all my brothers and sisters in the faith, you are **Dearly Loved Saints** of God. ***“If we walk in the light, just as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.”*** (1:7 EHV) We can be patient with ourselves and each other because we are **Still children here....** And there...

✦ **What we will be....?** (vv.2-3)

“What we will be has not yet been revealed.” When I was growing up, I wanted to be a policeman. No, maybe a fireman. No, a doctor – yes, I started reading *The Book on the Physician Himself*, until a few chapters in I realized it wasn’t really meant for a fifth grader. Then, maybe I want to be a teacher, but never a pastor. Then during my vicar year at Sem when I was almost a pastor, serving in Campus Ministry, I found out that American college students were changing their major on average eight times in four years. If we can’t tell what we will be when we grow up on earth, how can we know **What we will be** in heaven?

The dear Holy Spirit does give us some clues, however. ***“We know that when he is revealed we will be like him, and we will see him as he really is.”*** With Job we also confess in that great resurrection passage: ***“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”*** (Job 19:25-27 NIV)

We long for the day when these eyes will see the crucified, risen and glorious Christ in His glorified body. ***We will see him as he really is, and we will be like him.*** So what is Jesus like now that He is risen from the dead? Sometimes the disciples did not recognize Jesus, but then He enabled them. (Luke 24:16). He was making Himself known at will to Mary Magdalene (John 20:15f), to the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:30ff). And we find examples of recognizing people in heaven. (Luke 9:30f; 16:19-31) In His glorified body Jesus is able to eat (Luke 24:41f), but He does not have to because He ***“will never die again”*** (Romans 6:9 EHV). We can also see through Jesus’ Revelation to John on the Lord’s Day, while John was in exile on the island of Patmos. The glory shining in Jesus will be reflected in His saints in glory. This was prophesied through Daniel: ***“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) **What we will be...? – details not yet known.**

More important than curious details is how God wants us to react to this awesome, glorious fact that we are already now **Dearly Loved Saints** of God for Jesus’ sake. The Lord says through John: ***“Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as Jesus is pure.”*** Walking through the rubble of humanity here, you’re bound for glory there. Keep cleansing in Christ by Word and sacrament.

So often we need Christ’s cleansing from bitterness and strife. Christians in Coventry, England, November, 1940, felt the need. The ground shook as their cathedral burned from two direct hits by Nazi bombs in the Battle of Britain. Imagine our church was made of stone instead of wood and steel, smoldering in ashes. “How do we rebuild?” we could ask as they did. They left the burned walls standing, and built a new church right alongside. The West Screen was erected as a wall of windows etched with saints and angels, 4’ wide and 10’ tall. Looking through the glass to the other side is the bombed out cathedral. Earth’s devastation is clearly in view, but only as seen through the glories of heaven with the saints and angels of God. We get to see ourselves here as **Dearly Loved Saints** of God. In this afternoon’s Memorial Service for our sainted brother Barry Gostchock, we will focus on the glory that awaits us, as viewed in today’s First Reading from Revelation 7:9-17. Clearly the best is yet to be. Glory be to Jesus! Amen.

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