

**Please take a sermon prior to the worship service only if necessary due to hearing impairment. After the service, sermons are available for any who wish to take one.**

“Hope in What We Will Be”  
I John 3: 1-3  
by Rev. Meghan Davis  
Longview Presbyterian Church  
November 6, 2011

Here we are again—All Saints Sunday. It’s been a tough year for many in this congregation. We’ve lost loved ones. Too many. We find ourselves here today and for some, it may seem too soon to re-visit this hallowed ground. For some, it may be a welcome opportunity to publicly acknowledge the grief you carry with you, mostly in private, every day. As Mother Kathleen Patton noted at the All Saints’ service at St. Stephen’s on Wednesday night, though grief is universal, grief is highly individual. There are as many forms of grief as people grieving multiplied by the number of people for whom we grieve. And every form of grief is valid.

But at the same time, grief can be, and usually is, complicated. Our grief is rarely straight-up grief. Sometimes the death was so long and drawn out, so painful that we find ourselves almost relieved it’s finally over. And our grief is mixed with guilt for that sense of relief. Sometimes our grief is complicated by the nature of the relationship we had with the one who has died. For various reasons, I was not particularly close with any of my grandparents and my grief for their death is almost eclipsed by a sadness over that lack of relationship. To be blunt, I’m sad that I’m not more sad.

We come here today to remember and honor our loved ones who are no longer with us. Those whom we assume—or hope—have been taken up into the merciful arms of the Creator and are now in that “better place.” Those whom we hope to join one day. As the hymn goes, “Some glad morning when this life is o’er,/I’ll fly away./To a home on God’s celestial shore./I’ll fly away.”

But some of us may be worrying about those same loved ones. Are they really “there”? Some of us might be thinking, “I loved Aunt Suzie, but she sure wasn’t a saint.” How do we honor these departed loved ones on All Saints Day without making them something they weren’t?

I like the way a retired Presbyterian pastor explained, “All Saints’ Day is a time when as the family of faith, children of God and joint heirs with Christ, we not only bear each other’s burdens but also claim for those who have died the hope and confidence we have together in the risen Christ. Through the credibility of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we claim our legacy, which is grounded in the victory of Christ over sin and the grave.”<sup>1</sup>

So let us turn to our scripture, a message of comfort and hope. The passage begins, “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” God’s freely given gift of love claims us as God’s children

---

<sup>1</sup> William N. Jackson, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 4. ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 232.

while calling us into relationship with God and with one another, our brothers and sisters in the family of God. When I hear this phrase, “children of God,” particularly as it’s used here, “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are,” there’s a sense of comfort and warmth there. Whether or not you have or had good relationships with your earthly parents, whether you had a happy or difficult childhood, you are a child of God who can rest, relax and feel safe in God’s arms. Regardless of difficulties in our past or in our present, we can each delight in the child we are: God’s beloved child. Claim your identity as a child of God and all good that is associated with that identity.

The scripture moves on to hope, “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” Although we are already God’s children, the transformation is not complete. “What we will be has not yet been revealed.” What we will be is a beautiful mystery. Beautiful potential. We all have the potential and we all will realize the potential. We are given hope in the assurance that we do not know what we will become. We are given hope that this is not all there is. We are given hope for our loved ones who have “gone before us” as well as hope for ourselves here and now.

Rev. John Buchanan, pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago and editor of *Christian Century* magazine, writes: “Christian hope is as big as the whole sweep of human history, but also as small as each individual. Ultimate issues have been resolved for the human race, but also for each of us individually. In every congregation are faithful people genuinely frightened about where human history seems to be headed. Freedom, justice, and compassion seem fragile in the face of the forces of oppression, injustice, violence and torture. Living in hope does not mean immunity to the harsh realities of history. On the contrary, it means living confidently and expectantly, trusting that the Lord of history continues to come into life with compassion and redemption and hope.”<sup>2</sup>

Sisters and brothers, we are already God’s children. But what we will become, what we will be transformed into is something even beyond that. We can find comfort in that hope. We can find comfort, hope and joy in the expectation of what we will become.

Our scripture concludes, “And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” Wow. You don’t hear that very often. Hope is purifying. We tend to have a notion that we have to be righteous. We worry about our loved ones and ourselves that maybe we won’t be purified because we’re not strict enough. We worry that we haven’t done great deeds or abstained heroically enough to be purified. But this scripture tells us that simple hope—hope in what we will become—purifies us.

There’s a slogan frequently found on motivational posters, often with a cute picture of an animal: “Be patient, God’s not done with me yet.” Indeed, God’s not done with any of us yet. God’s not done with us. God wasn’t done with our loved ones at the times of their death. But there is comfort to be found in the assurance that God has claimed us as God’s children. There is hope in the assurance that “what we will be has not yet been revealed.” And in that hope, we will be purified by the One who calls us Beloved Children.

---

<sup>2</sup> John M. Buchanan, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 4. ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 286-288