

Pastor T.C. Arnold
All Saints' Day (observed)
1 John 3:1-3
November 7th, 2010

Several children were playing on the school playground – a few of them giving one particular child a hard time because he was adopted. The child sat there passively as they taunted him and called him names. Finally, as they exhausted their supply of insults, he replied, “You know, your parents had to take you. They didn’t have any choice. You were born to them. My parents loved me so much that they went and picked me out special.”

Jesus once said to His disciples, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you*” (John 15:16). That’s the wonder of being what you are – a child of God – an adopted son or daughter. We weren’t born that way nor do we have the right to claim that title, because sin has torn us from the beautiful father/child relationship we were meant to have with God. In a sense, Adam and Eve “ran away from home” when they disobeyed God, and humanity has been running from Him ever since. From the time we’re born, we’re spiritual orphans and misfits, homeless waifs without love or hope or promise.

But the Father’s love for us is so great that He sent our Brother, Jesus Christ, to bring us back into this runaway world, and even though He had the right of a Son, He became an orphan on the cross, one forsaken by His Father, one who literally went to hell and back to win for us forgiveness and the right of adoption as God’s children. By His death and resurrection, Jesus earned the privilege for you and me to call God “Father,” an honor we claim only by faith. We are reconciled to God, wayward children “picked out special” by God’s love and adopted into the eternal family.

Maybe to give us a better idea of this precious gift of “Adoption as sons” we can look at our Lord’s relationship with His people in both the Old and New Testaments. These are two pictures which aptly and vividly set out this relationship. In the Old Testament we have this “covenant idea.” In other words, Israel was the “covenant” people of God. That is to say, God on His own initiative had made a special approach to Israel; He was to be uniquely their God, and they were to be uniquely His people. As an integral part of the covenant, God gave to Israel His law and it was on the keeping of that law, and the maintenance of the law, that the covenant relationship depended. To put it another way, All nations belonged to God. God is God of all people. But Israel was His son in a special sense because God had called them and they had responded in a special way.

In the New Testament this whole reality of adoption is made clear to include each and every one of us. Romans 8 says, “*for all are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God... you have received the adoption as sons...*” Galatians 3:26 says, “*For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*” And then a little further in chapter 4 Paul says, “*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*” Here is the idea that by a deliberate act of adoption on the part of God the Christian enters into the family of God. His entry into that family is an act and a gift of God.

We do well to remember this fact...while all are children of God in the sense that they owe their lives to Him, they only become children of God in the intimate and loving sense of the term by an act of God’s work of reaching out to us and calling us His very own chosen and “adopted” children. The child being teased on the playground was right – and it’s right for us as well. We can say, “*My Heavenly Father loves me so much that He picked me out special.*”

And so here we are, children of God. That’s what you are by virtue of a loving adoption. I wish we could stay children. Not for the reasons that children have virtually no responsibility and far fewer worries. But rather because of the way we adults have become. For this reason, it might be

appropriate to say that we need to repent of our “adulthood”. Jesus would talk about receiving children into His kingdom. He talked about not running them off when they came to Him. He talked about their innocence, and He even talked about their untarnished faith. As we got older we gained sophistication, complexity and independence (not only from our parents but from God). Because of these “adult” attributes we stubbornly hang on to misguided ideas as we fool ourselves into believing complete trust in the Lord as His precious child is not all that important anymore. We say things like, “I have everything under control. I can make due my way. I am simply not dependant on anyone – including God – for guidance, strength, support and, even for some, for life eternal.” Becoming less like our Lord’s adopted children and more like independent adults is very dangerous, even deadly. Be cautioned, beloved in the Lord.

1 John 3:2 says, “*Beloved, we ARE God’s children now...*” Now means now. It’s present tense for whatever age you happen to be. It’s present tense because of who God made us to be today – adopted children – adopted saints. In the light of our celebration of All Saints Day we have the opportunity to remember those who have gone before us into heaven. We call them saints – they have received their crown of glory. But they are not the only ones. “Saint” in All Saints Day is a reference to each and every one of you. You are saints by virtue of who you are made to be by the one who gave you all that you need. You are a saint by virtue of your precious baptism. He made you His very own “saintly” child.

Last week was Reformation Day Sunday. As we could expect, Pastor Krueger referenced Martin Luther and his posting of the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany (the day of its posting was the eve of All Saints Day – which we celebrate today – and the day became known to us as Reformation Day – but to the world – All Hollows Eve – or Halloween). Luther lived in the moment. I’m not referring to Luther doing whatever he wanted to do (like many would interpret “living in the moment” today). Rather, Luther lived in the moment of his faith, obedient to the Scriptures. He lived in the moment of His baptism. Many different times Luther struggled with what he was taught regarding works and salvation. But each time he would come back to what was important. He said many times in his writings – “Nevertheless, I AM Baptized.” He didn’t refer to it in the past tense but in the present. I AM baptized. It’s not “we were” baptized – but rather I AM baptized.

So likewise it is not I WAS saved – but rather, I AM saved. You are what Christ makes you to be. It is present tense because you are present tense. We say, “I am hurting,” today. But we also can say, “Nevertheless, I am Baptized.” We say, “I am anxious and depressed,” today. But we can also say, “Nevertheless, I am Baptized...”

I AM a baptized child of God and Jesus calls me His very own. Our Lord gathers us close to Him, like children of the Heavenly Father. Our Lord tends and nourishes us, like children of the Heavenly Father. Our Lord shows us grace, like children of the Heavenly Father. God His children never forsakes, like Children of the Heavenly Father. Please turn to hymn number 725 in Lutheran Service Book. We conclude by singing “who” and “whose” we are – Like John the Divine says in the Epistle reading – “*Beloved we are God’s children now*” (present tense).

Sing hymn.

“Beloved, we are God’s children now,” says John. How? By adoption. God chose you. “*See what kind of love the Father has given to us.*” Amen.