

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
1 John 3:1-3  
April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012

You have heard it said that as Christians we live with a dual citizenship. We live in the world “now” where our citizenship belongs and in the world of the “not yet” of where our citizenship belongs. We live in the “now” and “not yet.” As a matter of fact every sermon you have ever heard from this pulpit has spoken of each of these – whether you thought of it in those terms or not.

You have thought of things like this: the “now” of life is hard. The now of life sees misery and heartbreak. The now of life sees fantastic highs and then deep “spirit-crushing” lows. The now of life has seen mercy to the needy and yet the selfishness of nations. You know the now – for the now is a daily occurrence for the children of God.

You have thought of things like this: the “not yet” of life will be glorious in Christ. The “not yet” was given to us in the picture of the empty tomb and the proclamation of the angel, “*He is not here. Come, see where He lay.*” The not yet is a lasting promise for the children of God and often times manifests itself in pictures in our mind. The not yet causes us to ask questions like, what will heaven look like? What will I be like in heaven? How will others look and how will I know those who have gone before me? The not yet seems so far away – it seems, at times in this fallen ill-gotten world, like it is just a dream. The not yet seems like nothing that could be tied to a world like ours – fallen, sinful, wretched, and filled with misery and pain.

But what is yet to come IS tied to this world. “*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*” “We are,” is what John’s first letter says in the Epistle for today. “We are,” is present tense. We live in the “now” as children of God.” God calls us His very own “now” just the same as we what we look forward to in the time to come, the “not yet.” Even though the world does not recognize who we are and whose we are (because they do not know Christ) this is what we are – His now and His unto eternity.

Beloved, please look at the back of your bulletin this morning and notice the words of the Epistle, especially the second verse. This verse picks up from the first. It says, “*Beloved, we are God’s children now...*” That’s the “now” and this promise comes from God. Then look at the rest of the verse, “*...and what we will be (future) has **not yet** appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be (future) like Him, because we shall see Him (future) as He is.*” This is the “not yet.”

Allow me to say it this way – the word “now” in verse two is emphatic. Not only does it obviously contrast with “not yet” in the same verse, but also it boldly asserts that despite the pain and the misery of this world – and the rejection of this world that we experience, we are indeed, without question, the children of God, “now!” Appearances cannot undo the reality of our belonging to God as His own adopted sons and daughters no matter the misery of our experiences today and our “lack of” understanding of what that our life in heaven in the “not yet” will look like. Permit an illustration.

If a baby during its nine-month existence in its mother’s womb had the capacity to think, to hope or not hope, it might find it difficult not only to imagine but also to accept as true what it “hears” about its future existence on earth. All the reports about light, space, stars, mountains, trees, skyscrapers, animals, and other creatures like itself might seem too good to be true. And that the process called birth, with all its attendant perils and pains, should be the gateway to the beautiful existence staggers both imagination and belief. To the unborn child it does not yet appear what it shall be. He or she simply just cannot comprehend – cannot know. Only at the time of birth does the child learn how gloriously true it all is. So we Christians, who still live in

the womb of time, find it difficult not only to imagine but also to believe the glowing accounts in God's Word about our future heavenly existence – the promises of eternal life, likeness to Christ, companionship with angels, dwelling in mansions, etc. And that the process called death – involving funeral homes, caskets and tombstones, and bodily decay – should be the gateway to this ecstatic existence staggers both imagination and belief. You remember what Martin Luther wrote in the explanation of the third article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel..." But on the day of our death, which will be the now, will be the day of our birth, the not yet. Today, in Christ, we live in and with both.

The apostle John is so clear about it... in this Epistle text and in the Gospel from the book that bears his name. The Gospel text says, "*You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, no one will take your joy from you.*" It's hard to imagine the joy right now. We are born again in the waters of Holy Baptism, but yet we are like the "pre-born" child left to imagine what perfect joy in heaven to come looks like. You see, here is the difference, we may not know and understand with our minds all that is already in store for us by God's grace, but we can know with our faith, the faith that Christ Himself gives, that this promise is true – That Christ comes for sinners and calls us His very own children who have heaven now. And in such an uncomfortable life we live in, a life plagued by our sins and the sins of others thrust upon us, we can take "comfort" in knowing that this is true – no matter what is happening to you at this very moment.

Last Sunday, Good Shepherd Sunday, we sang, **The King of Love My Shepherd Is**. Jesus is the King of love for today and for eternity. Our "Good Shepherd", even on this Sunday called Jubilate is still our Good Shepherd who is the King of love, so our theme continues. A little later we will sing about God's love again... and this love is for our "now" in Christ and for our "not yet" with Christ. We will sing, **God Loves Me Dearly**, because He does. He loves even me – the poor miserable sinner that I am.

Be assured, beloved in the Lord, that the King of love, loves you dearly – loves even you. And that in Christ's love we live today – even in the hardship and pain – and we will live with Him in heaven – in the "not yet" for eternity. Strangely, so many church people have the idea that one cannot really be sure of this. If they are asked, "Are you a Christian?" they will at times answer, "I hope so... I suppose I am." And, friends in Christ, that is not proper. If someone asks you, "Are you an American?" it does not occur to you to say, "I hope I am." No! You can be confident that you are. You know that you are. It is a for sure thing that in Christ, by grace through faith, that you are a dual citizen of where you are now and where you will be in the not yet.

The empty tomb shows us that this is true. We can rejoice with the kind of joy that John talks about in the Gospel and in the letter about the love of the Good Shepherd, our precious loving and life-giving king. We are children of God – loved by a Lord that would love us so much – He would be willing to die to make us His children.

Today is the day in Christ that Christ calls you His own – unto eternity. That's how we live – as citizens of heaven. May God richly bless you and keep you this day – even forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.