

## God's Love – Past, Present, Future

### 1 John 3: 1-3

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

#### **Introduction -**

If you have ever been momentarily blinded, you have a greater appreciation of your eyesight. There are times when military pilots are required to fly in “blackout” conditions at night. There are no lights on the airstrip, no lights on the aircraft. The pilots fly using Night Vision Goggles (NVGs). If you are a passenger during this type of nighttime landing, for about 15 minutes you sit in total darkness waiting anxiously for the wheels to hit the runway. I'm sure that's a little unnerving. What a relief when you can finally see again, when you can focus on the things in front of you. How is your vision? How well do you focus on things? If you wear glasses or contact lenses (and a few of us do), it is because you have had an eye exam. Some people opt for lasik eye surgery to make permanent changes to vision. Why? To *improve* our vision, right? Today's text is really about improving our vision. And it is John...probably close to 90 years old...who is telling his readers and us about vision. I mean, after all, how good was his vision? But it is true. John, in his letter to the church, reminds us that we should take a good, close *look* at the past, *look* around at our present situation, and have a positive *outlook* toward what our Lord has in store for us in the future.

#### **Past -**

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God!”

Immediately, John focuses our attention on the past action of our loving God. When you consider what John himself had seen, you can understand his enthusiasm for the Gospel. After all, he was part of the inner circle of disciples. His eyes had seen dozens of miracles, healings of all kinds. He had seen Jesus transfigured, seen thousands fed with just a few fish and loaves, seen the dead brought back to life again. Add to that his witnessing of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. He remarks, “SEE...what love the Father has given us.”

We, too, look at our own past. And, it is undoubtedly one that is filled with ups and downs. If we are honest, we must admit that our past is not something we are always willing to view too closely. It may even cause us to despair. However, we also see how God sent caring people to intrude into our lives with words of encouragement, with compassion, and with the power of the Gospel. Beginning with our

baptism, we began a new history in Christ. In baptism our sins were washed away and we became a new creation. We deserve punishment for our many sins but Jesus went to the cross and paid for our sins with his life. He died so that we might live. God's past action on Calvary changed the course of human history. It is, as John tells us, what makes us now, in the present, "children of God."

On this day we also remember God's many blessings to our nation. We thank God for the freedoms we enjoy as Americans (things like the freedom of speech, the freedom to express our opinions, the freedom to travel across this great land, the freedom to elect our leaders, the freedom to worship, to assemble together with fellow believers). Sometime I think we take these freedoms for granted but people in other countries around the world don't all enjoy those same freedoms.

On Memorial Day we also remember those fought and died so we can have the freedoms we enjoy today. We think back to the past all the way back to the Revolutionary War and the fight for independence from England – to the Civil War (the first military chaplains served during the Civil War. Throughout the history of our Synod chaplains have introduced hundreds of military men and women to Christ.) We think back to World War I and World War II (we still have quite a few members who served during World War II and more of us have family members who served) – to Korea and Vietnam and Desert Storm – to the current war going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. We thank God for the many brave men and women who have served our country so well. Memorial Day is not a religious holiday like Christmas or Easter. Maybe Memorial Day is just a day off of work for you, a day without school. Maybe it's a time to get together with family, to have a cook out. I want to encourage you this year to remember what Memorial Day is all about. How about going to a parade or a special memorial day service tomorrow. There's one at Graceland Cemetery; Wisconsin Memorial Park usually has memorial day services. It's good for us to remember and thank those who have served our country.

### **Present -**

The past action of Christ, declares John, means we are God's children now. John himself is expending every ounce of his strength declaring the Gospel to all who will hear. He lives to proclaim. Likewise, we too, as God's children, are alive to proclaim hope and life through Christ... now! That's our purpose, that's our mission, to share the love of Christ, to let our light shine in the world, and connect people to Jesus Christ. Wherever you are, wherever you serve, wherever you live now is where God wants you to be His witness.

Today our Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has 71 active duty military chaplains. Another 96 chaplains serve Reserve and National Guard units. Currently, eight chaplains are in Iraq or Afghanistan, including

several mobilized from their parishes. One of them is Pastor Gene Henke from Our Redeemer Lutheran in Wauwatosa who left last week for Iraq. The ministry provided by these chaplains is so important as they bring the peace and hope and strength of God to those they serve. It's not just the chaplains who witness for Christ. We have many Christian men and women in our military and what a wonderful opportunity they have, stationed around the world, to show others and tell others about their faith in Jesus. Our chaplains...military personnel, and Veteran's Administration Hospitals are faithfully witnessing to their Lord. Regardless of where we are, we are constantly in a state of confessing our faith in Christ for others to see. That is also true for you and me. As we live our faith daily, we give witness to Christ. Each of you is a witness, whether you know it or not, whether you like it or not. (My Devotions for this week had good thoughts on this)

### **Future -**

John lived to proclaim Christ because he saw a hopeful future. At the end of today's text he says, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." John recognizes that there is still much to be done. He reminds us, we don't know what is ahead of us, but we have great possibilities. We also see a future filled with hope. Though we don't have a crystal ball, we know that because of God's past action, and our relationship as His children, we live in God's abundant love and we have the hope of eternal life. I am reminded of the story of the man who approached a little league baseball game one afternoon. He asked a boy in the dugout what the score was. The boy responded, "Eighteen to nothing— we're behind." "Boy," said the spectator, "I'll bet you're discouraged." "Why should I be discouraged?" replied the little boy. "We haven't even gotten up to bat yet!" Now that is the attitude of hope and victory!

As we think about our lives and look around our world, it's easy sometimes to get discouraged – the economy, the unemployment rate, violence and crime, sickness and death. There's a lot of ugliness out there. But John reminds us this morning that we have a future with God, an eternal future. Christ has overcome the world and opened the gates of heaven to all who believe. Forgiven and redeemed in Jesus Christ we will live with God forever. We can and should live every day with an attitude of hope and victory!

**Conclusion -**

John encourages us to look at our past. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. He reminds us of the present, our current state of faith. And finally, we focus on the future. Because of God's past action of defeating sin and death through Christ Jesus, we live in His victory now, and we look forward to the future here and in eternity. Amen.

Almighty God, as Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Glory to Thee, O Christ, our ascended and ever-present Lord, through whom we have access to the Father. Glory to You, who loves us and has loosed us from our sins. Glory to You, who has reconciled us all in one body unto God, through Your cross, so that we are no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints in the household of God. Glory to You, who has gone before to prepare a place for us in Your Father's home. Glory to You, the Author and Finisher of our faith, that God in all things may be glorified.