

**“Children of the Living God”**  
**1 John 3:1-3; Revelation 7:9-17**  
**A Sermon by Rev. Bob Kells**

Today is All Saints Day, a day we dedicate to celebrating the lives of God’s saints. This is a day to celebrate all the saints—those on earth and those who have gone home to be with the Lord. This day, above all other days in the Church Year, we rejoice in the connection between the saints who labor on earth and the saints who are at rest in heaven. We celebrate because we understand that they, like we, are beloved and cherished by God. They are loved, and we are loved, by the God who knows us, the God who created us, the God who brings forth life and who ensures eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Our reading today from 1 John 3 reinforces who we are before God.

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God (1 John 3:1). This identity as God’s children is critical for us. It describes us not by our attributes, whether physical, mental, or emotional. It doesn’t distinguish us by our accomplishments, our vocations, or our economic or social status. Our identity describes us by our relationship with God. We are God’s children; we are adopted into the family of God.

Here’s something important to remember about children, something we all know: they don’t stay children; they grow up. Those of us who have children of our own watched them grow with a mixture of amazement, wonder, awe, and at times, fear. Our children grow up so fast. And in the process of growing into mature adults, they go through periods of joy and periods of frustration.

Adolescence contains some frustrating times. It is the time when our children, who have watched the adult world since they were young, begin to assert themselves. They are betwixt and between; already able to act like an adult in many ways, but not yet able to exercise wisely the full range of the freedoms and the responsibilities that come with being an adult. Sometimes they don’t quite get the responsibility part of the deal—with greater freedoms come greater responsibilities—but most eventually get it and grow into adults we are proud of. That period of being “betwixt and between,” of being ready for some things but not yet for all, applies in our relationship with God as well. The author of 1 John captures this with these words:

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 will see him as he is (1 John 3:2-3).

We are children of God, made in God’s image, made to grow and to change and to become more and more like Jesus Christ. Like all children who grow, in this case spiritually, we go through periods of frustration and anticipation as we wonder: who are we becoming in Christ? We can see some of it in the here and now by the ways God has loved us, saved us, and gifted us for service to God. We are already doing many of the things our Divine Parent in heaven calls us to do: learning more about God; loving God through prayer and study and worship; sharing that love with others; and, serving God in Christ by helping others. But we are not there yet. We still have room to grow. And when we allow it, God works in us to bring us to maturity in Jesus Christ.

Being a child of God is an intimate relationship. God the Father loves us and cares for us, God knows our needs even before we cry out to God. What can we do to grow into Christian maturity?

- We can do our best to live the life God wants us to live, allowing God to mold us through our experiences; to direct us in our God-given gifts in service to others.
- We need to be obedient, so that we don’t succumb to the values of this world, but live by God’s values of love, grace, forgiveness, and peace.
- We need to remember we have a purpose to live into: to be God’s agents of healing and reconciliation in the world.

We do all these things because we know who we are: we are God's children. We are made in God's image. And we are called to reflect God's image into the world to bring the healing and wholeness of God to bear on the world's brokenness.

Think of the many ways our children reflect our images. Our children look like us in many ways—how many times have you said a child is the “spittin’ image” of their parent? Sometimes certain behaviors, skills, and talents are passed on from one generation to the next. Our children reflect our image in many ways. Just so, as children of God, we are to reflect God's image.

And another thing: as God's children, we cannot stay children forever. God wants us to grow. The Apostle Paul wrote of this in his letter to the church in Ephesus, when he was talking about the reason God gave spiritual gifts to the church:

“The gifts [God] gave,” wrote Paul, “were...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

The saints of God don't stay children forever. Remember: Jesus called his followers friends and reminded us that his family were those who do the will of God. We are growing into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Right now, we may not see it. Right now, we may have a hard time believing it. That's because right now, we are in that betwixt and between time. This is the time when God's reign is already here, but not yet fully realized. Until then, we are children, we live and we grow, we allow God to mold us and mature us into the image of Jesus.

One other thing to keep in mind about God's children is that they are numerous and diverse. We get a glimpse of this in the Revelation reading where a countless host has gathered in the heavenly throne room. They are “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,” and they stand before the throne to honor God. They sing praises to God, for God has washed them clean from sin.

God is renewing creation, making it a place where:

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Revelation 7:16-17).

This is the future God brings, a future where God is coming in fullness to set the world aright, to end injustice, oppression, and sadness. To bring eternal life in all its fullness to the people God loves. This future began with Jesus Christ. Through him, the Kingdom of God is coming into the world.

We children of God live into this hope. Hope that keeps us going through this life as we live, and grow, and mature as God's children.

Today, we remember all the children of God, those who are with us on earth now, striving to live the life of Jesus, allowing Jesus to transform us, to grow us, into the people God desires us to become. We also celebrate the children of God who have gone home to be with God. And though we cannot see them now, we know they are alive and at rest in the Lord Jesus.

- Praise and thanks be to God for our adoption as Children of the living God.
- Praise and thanks be to God for our continuing growth into Christian maturity.
- Praise and thanks be to God for the children of God who have completed their tasks and now live with God.

All praise and thanksgiving be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, whose kingdom is coming, whose reign is forever, whose love for us never ends. Amen, and amen.