

"The Miracle of God's Rescue"

Text: 1 John 3:1-3

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ – that same undeserved love that caused him to earn the forgiveness necessary for our salvation – may that same grace be multiplied to each one of you, together with the loving care of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Fellow Saints, dissension is a good thing. Agree or disagree? Dissension is generally defined as having and debating different viewpoints or opinions. On the one hand, the Apostle Paul seemed to *disagree* that dissension was good when by inspiration he wrote in Titus 3:9-11: ***But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.*** ¹⁰ ***As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,*** ¹¹ ***knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.*** He also listed "dissensions" among the sinful works of the flesh in Galatians 5:20, and he pleaded with the Church in Corinth ***"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."*** Yet, on the other hand, we read in Acts 15 that Paul and Barnabas ***"had no small dissension and debate"*** with those who claimed that Old Testament requirements like circumcision were still necessary for salvation. So which is it?

Whenever God's Word speaks *against* "dissension," it does so from the starting point of the truth, as dictated or determined by God himself and revealed to us in His Word. It was any view *contrary* to the Word of God that was condemned, along with pointless debate over unimportant questions. That also means that in a sinful world, filled with so much that is false, dissension is both good and necessary.

It's no secret to anyone who pays even just a little bit of attention that we live in what has come to be known as a "cancel culture." Those who disagree with popular opinion (as they themselves define it) are cancelled. They are cut off from public forums, publicly and privately ridiculed, harassed at work and at home, and often have their livelihoods taken from them. Never mind that our very way of life was founded on the premise that free speech is one of those inalienable rights given by God and guaranteed in our Constitution.

In a sinful world, dissension is both good and necessary – for all. Nobody is always right. We all need help to see when and where we are wrong. A perfect example is that which we celebrate this morning, All-Saints Sunday. For a time, because of its abuse and because of a general misunderstanding among Christians as to just who and what this Sunday is all about, this worthy celebration was cancelled by well-meaning Christians. That was a mistake, as we will soon make clear.

The text that will guide us in our re-evaluation this morning is part of God's verbally inspired Word found recorded in John's First Epistle, beginning with the first verse:

ESV 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. ² 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. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

These are God's words. Think of it. The very words of God, recorded and preserved down through the ages so that we also, on this day, might hear and learn from them. That these words would have God's desired effect in our hearts, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

All Saint's Day fell into disrepute and was eventually cancelled because of those who imagine that forgiveness can be gained by praying to a list of certain dead people. Their considered opinion was that we do more damage than good by celebrating what has been so thoroughly perverted. We disagree. The commemoration is worth it because our God is worth it.

Remember, God is supposed to be the focal point for this and every other Sunday service. He is to be the center or heart of all that we do. Consider how we end each Lord's Prayer: ***"...For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever."*** Those are not just words; they are facts. The words rightly say ***"For thine IS..."*** not ***"should be..."*** Nor are they exaggerations. They are actually *understated* truths. They are *understated* in that mortal human beings really cannot fully comprehend just how worthy our immortal God is of our praise and adoration in absolutely every aspect of life. Since ***"every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father..."*** it is then also true

that that same God is worthy of thanksgiving, praise, and honor for an infinite number of big and little things in our lives every single day.

Why should All Saint's Day be any different? On this day we sing the praises of our God for the grace given to all the believers who have been brought to, preserved, and carried home in the one true, saving faith. Think for just a moment about how precious and commendable such a celebration really is. Once you get past the notion that a saint is a human being with more good works than sins (every believer is sinless in God's sight through faith in Jesus Christ) and once you remember that this celebration is directed towards God rather than man, nothing could be more natural than to celebrate God's victories in saved sinners.

In fact we do ourselves a great disservice when we fail to make a big deal about the rescue of even *one sinner*. Why is this such a great disservice? Because it *is* a big deal. Every single Christian who dies in the faith is an eternal victory over humanly insurmountable odds.

Are you having trouble grasping the magnitude of the victory of every saved sinner? Think about it in these terms. Every single one of us started our lives as a spiritual failure. We had lost before we even started because we were born "**dead in trespasses and sins.**" In fact this is one of the clearest truths taught in Scripture. We could never keep God's command to be holy because we were *born* sinful. Even the youngest child here this morning was born "**dead in trespasses and sins.**" Hardly seems fair, does it? We also understand that human beings have added a never-ending supply of sins to those with which we were born. Original (birth) sin sealed our doom before we even took our first breath, but every one of us did more than enough to condemn ourselves even without original sin. Still God rescued us.

What is even more remarkable about the salvation of any sinner has to do with the enemies we face. How can any human being possibly do battle against an enemy that we can't even see. Even worse, apart from Jesus Christ, we don't even have any weapons that could possibly be effective in such a struggle. Even *worse yet* is the fact that this unseen, indefensible enemy has a traitorous ally that remains inside every human being - our own sinful flesh. In other words, there is a part of each one of us that sides with our mortal enemy, and every inclination of that old Adam in us works toward our own eternal destruction.

Makes one wonder how things could get any worse. They can, since we also acknowledge a total inability for any sinner to choose the right path to heaven. Add to that the fact that there is only one path – through faith

in Jesus Christ – together with the fact that *someone else* has to show us that path (we cannot find it on our own) and then the Holy Spirit has to work through that message of salvation to bring us to faith. All that, and that's just the start. From that point on, and every single day of our lives, the devil and his allies will try to rob us of the saving faith that we have been given. If we had no one but ourselves to stand guard, the fortress of our human hearts would certainly and quickly fall.

How in the world then can anyone at all ever be brought to faith, let alone kept or preserved in that faith? **Thanks be to God, who gives us such a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!** Only God could do something that great, which is why our God most certainly is worthy of eternal praise, honor, and glory for every single sinner he rescues from an eternity in hell and blesses instead with immortality in heaven.

Society is terminally clueless as to how or why anyone is saved. The most common idea is that God judges a human being's relative goodness and allows into his heaven all that are "good." Yet the Bible calls God the Father a *judge* for a reason. To correctly dispense justice, even a secular judge cannot just set aside the law; he is sworn to uphold it. So too God the Father cannot simply overlook the transgressions of sinners and reward them with heaven for "doing their best" or some such silliness. No one is rewarded with heaven for being a "good guy." Every sin demands payment, and here there are only two options: you pay the eternal death penalty for every single sin, or the debt is charged to Jesus Christ. That is why it is well said that the only sin that damns is unbelief. Unbelief is a rejection of Jesus and his gift of salvation. It is a personal denial that Jesus did what he said he did, and it is therefore an eternal death-sentence.

For this reason the notion that God will offer free general admission to heaven on Judgment Day to anyone who does *not* believe in Jesus Christ is simply wrong. Damnably wrong. Eternally wrong. It is not only impossible, the very thought that it *is* possible can and does wreak havoc with a naïve, unbelieving world. Divine justice would not, could not, allow it. The one who believes will certainly be saved, but the one who does *not* believe will just as certainly be condemned, no matter how socially good that individual seems on the outside.

Given all of this, we truly stand in awe of the miracle that God has worked in every Christian – both bringing us to faith and in keeping us in the faith until the very end of our lives on earth. How fitting and proper, therefore, to set aside a day – or at least a worship service – to marvel at the goodness of our God and sing his praise for souls delivered from the eternal torments of hell.

Here is where our text comes into play, and why the miracle of God's rescue stretches on into eternity.

How then could any of us, foul creatures that we all are, ever be admitted into such a perfect, holy place as God's heaven? The answer is that it is a true miracle, and the first part of that miracle begins here in time – right *now*: ***See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*** Our first Scripture reading from the Book of Revelation introduces all believers with these words: ***"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence."*** That's you and me, along with every single sinner who has died with saving faith in his or her heart. That's the Holy Christian Church – the very bride of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. But that's not only then, it's now. Right now, at this very moment, you and I also stand before a perfect, holy God as sinless and pure, having been cleansed by Jesus himself – by the blood he shed for us on the cross when he paid for our sins. How can blood be used to wash anything? The filth we had was spiritual; it was the corruption of sin, and as John also tells us earlier in this same Epistle ***"the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin."*** (1 John 1:7)

There's still more cause for celebration. While we have *now* been washed clean and given life, there will be still more *later*. At the resurrection of the dead, every single member of the communion of saints gets the ultimate transformation. Everything bad, cumbersome, unclean, or undesirable in any way is removed forever, and we are left with holy, glorified bodies, forever. Pain, sorrow, death, decay – gone, eternally. Joy, comfort, security, immortality – ours for all eternity. So says our text: ***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.*** Nothing holy or impure could exist in the unfiltered presence of God, therefore the fact that we will ***"see him as he is"*** guarantees a holiness we cannot now fully comprehend.

Our God has done this for us. Right now, at his very moment, we stand holy and sinless in his sight. In heaven, we will personally experience the incredible, utterly amazing transformation of all who leave this life in faith. Countless thousands have already been rescued and are now asleep in the perfect comfort of their Lord's enfolded arms. You know and love many of them. Will you be among them? With Jesus as your Savior, you need have no doubt. With faith in Jesus and the forgiveness he earned for you, your place too has been secured. God grant that we learn to appreciate our privileged place among the Communion of Saints, and to live our lives in the pure joy of who and what, by God's grace, we are, and will be. Amen.

ESV **Revelation 21:9-11, 22-27** Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal... ²² ¶ And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day--and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

ESV **Matthew 5:1-12** Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ ¶ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

ESV **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. ² 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. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.



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All-Saints Sunday – November 7, 2021

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 767 (*Verses 1-3*) (*Brown Hymnal*)
"Church of God, Elect and Glorious"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Scripture Lessons: (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

The First Lesson: (Revelation 21:9-11, 22-27) Our first lesson on this All-Saints Sunday is intended to remind us not only of the victory that every sinner enjoys through faith in Jesus Christ, but of the unimaginable glory and perfection of heaven. This is intended by God to be a great comfort for those of us still remaining in this evil, sin-broken world. Those Christians whose time of grace has ended are not gone, they have gone ahead to a place of pure peace and joy. God be praised for the rescue of unworthy sinners.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 116 (Projected on Screens)

The Second Lesson: (Matthew 5:1-12) A saint is rightly defined as "one who has no sin in God's eyes." All Christians are therefore saints, since God has already punished Jesus for our sins, and his perfection is credited to us by faith. Having been paid by Jesus, God no longer sees our sins. Having now been washed clean by Jesus' blood, there are other virtues that God wants to see in his saints. Several of those characteristics were outlined by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount. Struggling to make these characteristics our own is how we now seek to thank our God.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 463 (*Stanzas 1-4*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"For All the Saints"

The Sermon – Text: 1 John 3:1-3 (*Printed on the back of this bulletin*)

"The Miracle of God's Rescue"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 463 (*Stanzas 5-8*) (*Red Hymnal*)

"For All the Saints "

The Prayers of the Day followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 766 (*Brown Hymnal*)
"Sing with All the Saints in Glory"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (30)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-6:00 p.m.	– Joint Reformation Service - Jamestown
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Jamestown
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Women's Fellowship Meeting

CLC News – Pastor James Albrecht has returned the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Pastor Rob Sauers is considering the call to Faith Lutheran of St Louis. Living Word of Eden Prairie has called Pastor Neal Radichel.

Joint Reformation Service – Our Annual Joint Reformation service is this afternoon/evening in Jamestown. The service is at 6pm (previously announced as 5pm) followed by a fellowship meal. Please let Pastor Roehl know if you plan to attend so that, if possible, we can carpool. Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend a Study Conference in Jamestown on Monday.

Women's Fellowship – The next Women's Fellowship meeting is scheduled to coincide with the Annual Voters meeting on December 19th. A short meeting is also planned during the fellowship hour next Sunday to organize the Church Christmas party. Please address any questions to Cindy Ollenburger.

Looking Ahead – So that parents can get this onto their busy upcoming holiday calendars, a Christmas Eve rehearsal is scheduled for Saturday, December 18th at 10am. There will be a pizza party following the rehearsal. Our annual Thanksgiving service is scheduled for Nov. 24th.