

1 John 3:1-3

1 See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 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 we will see him as he is. 3 And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Proclamation of the Word

All Saint's Sunday is something Protestant Christians are still trying to understand. In fact the word saints conjure up for many of us a picture of a heavenly choir singing "Holy, holy, holy" and polishing their crowns- and in some ways that is true just as we heard in the vision we read from Revelation. We may think of saints as martyrs who have lived and died in the faith doing extraordinarily holy things. In other words, Saints are the faithful dead (not the grateful dead).

For others of us we think of living saints as people who are holy, righteous, perfect. Sometimes by saintly, we mean "holier than thou".

Saintliness has little to do with our goodness, our holiness and everything to do with God's grace. John writes, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God." Saints belong to God and you, my friends, are God's children.

To me **saints are regular people who allow the light of Christ and the love of God shine through them.**

And saints are part of the household and family of God. We are in the **community of saints**- or "communion of saints" as we say in the Apostle's Creed. I learned a new word this week- *kyrioikos* (Gr.).¹ *Kyrioikos* is the word from which we get CHURCH. Even sounds closer to KIRK. It means "Those who belong to the Lord."

To put it simply- saints are Christians.

Together as God's Kirk or church, we are the ones through whom the light of Christ and the love of God shines. God's love is a gift, a present that we have been given. It is the hallmark of our life together. How we live together that shows the world what we believe about God. You see, John was writing to a church in huge schism and conflict. He ends up writing the greatest love letter to the church ever written. John reminds the church who and whose they are and then challenges them to live that way.

You might be thinking- Now preacher, you know there are all kinds of love talked about in this world- there is brotherly love, Miami love, Big Love. Love is used in so many ways. What kind of love is John talking about?

John tells us,

"We know love by this that he (Jesus) laid down his life for us- and we out to lay down our life for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help? Little children, let us love not in word or speech, but in truth and action." (1 John 3: 16-18)

The church has always been defined by the love of God we see most clearly in Jesus Christ. Laying down your life, giving away your life, your substance for others is love. Love is an action.

EXPOSED infants and murder of infants was normal in 1st century Roman Empire- legally, socially and morally accepted – quote from a loving husband...

Know that I am still in Alexandria.... I ask and beg you to take good care of our baby son, and as soon as I received payment I shall send it up to you. If you are delivered (before I come home), if it is a boy keep it, if a girl, discard it. (Naphtali Lewis, Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule, page 54.)

The Early Christians were seen as an odd group, a strange minority, surrounded by pagans in the Roman Empire. They were known for their strange acts of love. The Christians would adopt abandoned children and take them into their homes because they knew that to love was to act. We know that rich and poor discarded children, particularly those babies who were disabled and girls. It was normal. This early practice of rescuing children was deemed counter-cultural. And people noticed that there was something special about Christians. Because of this practice of caring for the left out, the Presbyterian Church supports the Thornwell Home for Children which takes in children who have been abused, neglected, and abandoned.

Saints or Christians are those who allow the light of Christ and the love of God to shine through them in very real, very tangible ways. Those Christians knew what love God had given to them. And they were called to live in that love especially to those most vulnerable.

“See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children.” - show the world love, not just for those inside these walls today, but those the “world” deems unnecessary, unimportant, and without value.

RACHEL- a girl born with cerebral palsy in a former church. Some were uncomfortable with her in worship. Confirmation class showed love in action. Child of the Father- she taught us about human weakness, vulnerability. Joy as she sang to the organ. They each took turns taking care of Rachel for part of worship so her mom could relax and worship. That way Rachel could participate and the kids showed love in action to a child of the church who deserved to be included.

Who has shown you true love? Who in the communion of saints have taught you that you are Love’s child, children of the Father- was it a parent, a spouse, a friend? May be some one who

Or maybe it is a person who stepped into a hard place, a messy place with you and loved you through it? Some of us are carrying heavy burdens- a marriage that is hanging together by a thread, an illness that is testing your limits, finances that are a wreck, a family member whose troubles seem to just get worse. Some of the most courageous people I know are living in very difficult places. And Christians are not afraid by brokenness, but step in with love.

Christians are people who love without fear. John writes later in this love letter that perfect love casts out fear- not afraid to mess up and to get involved in the messiness of loving others. Christians are not afraid to risk their reputation to love some the world calls outcast, unworthy. Christians are not afraid to speak out against injustice. Christians are not afraid to have own imperfections and ineptitude revealed. The Bible does not say perfect people cast out fear, but perfect love casts out fear.

Come to church- look our best, act our best, but don’t you dare show them your failures, your habits which make you appear weak or even too proud. Church should be a place where we can be honest. God’s love and light slips in through the cracks, the chinks in our armor. Be real. Church of all places is a place to be real, honest, open to the love of Jesus in most unexpected ways. I was a part of a church once which formed a partnership with a neighboring Black Presbyterian church. We worked together to deal with the demon of racism by sharing in worship and meeting in smaller groups. Sometimes that meant confronting and being confronted by uncomfortable truth about ourselves. But perfect love casts out fear. It is through the cracks that the light of Christ and the love of God gets in.

Grace- University Presbyterian, Seattle, WA- 3 prostitutes started coming to church with Grace. Now they did not dress like most folks at the church and they did not know how to act. Several families were tapped and asked to show hospitality to Grace's friends, the prostitutes. Once at Sunday lunch in the home of one family, the little 6 year old girl climbed in the lap of one of the women. She began touching her face and playing with her hair. "You are so beautiful" the little girl said her. The woman begins to weep. Later she said, "My body had been touched in so many ways, but never touched by such love."

Now, that is complete joy- not having a fun time at the ball game joy or laughing at a good joke kind of joy. That is complete, heavenly, Kingdom of God joy for both the recipient of love and the family who witnessed Jesus in the wholehearted love of that little 6 year old child. *Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in truth and action.*

Songwriter Leonard Cohen has a great line in his song *Anthem*:

"Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack, in everything. That's how the light gets in". Leonard Cohen. *Anthem*

It is through our cracks, our attempts, our imperfect offerings, and our bumbling faithfulness that the light gets in and Jesus, the son of God, the living Lord of the church gets in.

Those families had probably never befriended prostitutes before.

They were likely not comfortable, but knew that love takes risks.

I am sure they worried about what questions the children might ask.

But they also knew that perfect love casts out fear.

"See how they love each other," the pagans would say about the Christians.

Saints are those who belong to the Lord, the *kyrioikos*- the Church of Jesus Christ.

Saints are you and me together, the ones the light shines through.

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