Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
All Saints' Day
November 1, 2026
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
We are children of God now and forever.

See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are! The world does not know us, because it did not know him. Dear friends, we are children of God now, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he is revealed we will be like him, and we will see him as he really is. Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as Jesus is pure.

—1 John 3:1-3

When I was younger, my parents would take me and my siblings trick-or-treating. We would go to the houses of friends and family, and we loved getting candy. My favorite costume was to dress up like Martin Luther. I guess it was my way of tying the Lutheran Reformation with Halloween.

As you may know, Halloween is short for "All Hallows Eve." We're familiar with the word "hallow," right? To hallow means to make holy. It means to set something apart as holy. We, of course, use that word in the Lord's Prayer when we say in the first petition, **"Hallowed be your name."** In our catechisms we recite, **"God's name is certainly holy by itself, but we pray in this petition that we too may keep it holy."**

But today we also apply that word to us. Another word for "holy ones" is "saints." The Scriptures teach us that we are saints because we have been made holy by the perfect life and precious blood of Jesus. Saints are believers in Jesus. It's not just those who go to heaven. It's also a term that is used for *all* believers. We sometimes distinguish between the saints in heaven as the "Saints Triumphant" and the saints here on earth as the "Saints Militant."

So, put this all together. October 31 is "All Hallows Eve." It's "All Saints Eve." So, it's the night before *All Saints Day,* which is today, November 1.

Martin Luther intentionally chose to nail the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg on "All Hallows Eve." There were a lot of people in town. It was busy. It was a big festival celebration in the Middle Ages.

Now, in the Middle Ages, people had a profound sense of the demonic activity. Just think of Luther's Reformation hymn, ***A Mighty Fortress Is Our God:*** **"Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us."** People believed that the demons were especially active on the eve of *All Hallows*, on the eve of *All Saints Day*. People carved gourds with ugly faces and set them out to guard their homes. This was similar to the practice of carving grotesque gargoyles on the drain spouts of cathedrals to ward off devils. People paraded in the streets dressed up in costumes and masks thinking that would confuse the demons and confound their schemes.

So, let's keep this in mind with Halloween. You see, Satan is real. And he really attacks. Now, I know that some people just look at Halloween as fun opportunity to dress up and get some candy. But there is a really scary side to it as well. Satan loves it when people start to dabble with the occult and the darkness of demons.

But Satan doesn't even need to use *that* to get people. Sometimes the demons just play with your mind as they attack your status with God.

I've told the story of one of my previous members named Esther. But please permit me to share her story again. She was a member of my first congregation I served in North Hollywood, California. As she was on her death bed, her family called me to visit. They were extremely concerned. You see, Esther was saying the Lord's Prayer over and over again, shaking under her blankets in her bed. I got the sense that she was terrified.

So, I sat down next to her and had a devotion with here where I said, "Esther, Jesus has taken away all your sins. He has given you his perfection and holiness. You are God's child. He has forgiven your sins and has made you holy. He has opened heaven's door to you, and he is taking you home." After my devotion, a prayer, and a blessing, she immediately calmed down, almost like a sense of relief. She died later that night.

You see, I am convinced that Satan wants nothing more than to cause you to doubt what Jesus has done for you. The demons love to stir up your sins and plaster them before your eyes. Satan wants that for all God's people.

So, what a great passage we have before us today as we celebrate “All Saints Day.” This passage reminds us of and gives us certainty that **we are the children of God now and forever.**

John writes, **“See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God, and that *is* what we are!”**

I don’t know if you have ever heard of the story of the little girl on the playground with her classmates. Children were playing out on the playground at school, and some children began picking on a little girl. She was adopted, and they said things like, “You don’t have real parents. You don’t even know who your real parents are! You’re just adopted.”

As the little girl was walking away, she stopped, turned around, and said, “Oh yeah? When you were born, your parents didn’t have a choice. They had to keep you. My parents didn’t just have me. They *wanted* me.”

Now, of course, we know that parents want their children, but do you get her point? I have family members who have adopted their children, and I am amazed at the love those parents have for their adopted children. They chose to adopt their children.

My friends, that’s you! You are a child of God because God *wanted* you. He adopted you. From eternity, he *chose* you to be his own. Before you were ever born, God chose you to be a member of his family. He made your place in his family possible by carrying out a plan of salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ. Then, in time, God made his choice and his adoption a reality by sending his Spirit into your hearts and making you his own.

He signed the adoption papers through water as he put his name on you **“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”** And that work which began with your baptism God has continued in your heart to this day so that you can say with confidence, “I *am* a child of God!” **Right now, we are children of God.**

But just because we are children of God doesn’t mean everything is going to be perfect for us in this world. We still have aches and pains. We still are ridiculed and mocked by the people of this world. That’s why John also lifts our eyes from the world and plants our eyes on what is waiting for us after this world.

John writes, **“Dear friends, we are children of God now, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he is revealed we will be like him, and we will see him as he really is**.” **We are children of God now … and forever.**

Oh, there is so much here that God has left for our imagination. In fact, the apostle Paul says that **God has prepared things for us beyond our imagination.** But don’t you just wonder? What will it be like in heaven? I can only imagine. Will there be beds and pillows and houses and streets and cities? Will there be gardens and trees and rivers? Will there be basketball courts and golf courses? Will we have opportunities to study under some of the greatest teachers of all time, or will we know everything perfectly?

I know my body will be free from gout and headaches, and I’m so thankful for that. But will I have a body of a 20-year old or a 50-year old? Will I have some gray hair and wrinkles but with undiminished strength? I don’t know.

John says **we will be like Jesus**. What does that mean? I don’t think that he’s referring to what our *bodies* will be like in the resurrection. Oh, certainly, we know from the apostle Paul that our bodies will be glorified, just as Jesus’ body was glorified in the resurrection. But even then, what does *that* mean? I’m not fully sure!

But I think John is referring more to what our life will be like. We shall be like Jesus, perfect and holy. We shall be like Adam and Eve in the beginning, created in the image of God and made to be like God. Gone will be our sinful flesh and all those terrible temptations! Gone will be the guilt and the shame we feel when we’ve failed to do the good and managed to do the evil! Can you imagine that? Can you imagine having only pure and peaceful and happy thoughts in your mind all the time? Can you imagine the joy of loving perfectly all the time?

And that’s not all. John says that **we will see our Lord as he is**. Can you imagine? We’ll see Jesus face to face! Can you imagine what that will be like? I bet John did a lot of imagining at the end of his life. Imprisoned on an island. Separated from his friends. Living into his 90’s under the harsh conditions on a prison island. I doubt if there wasn’t a morning that John didn’t rise and think, “Maybe today I will get to see Jesus face to face again!” I doubt if the sun ever set that John didn’t pray as he prayed at the end of the book of Revelation, **“Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!”**

Friends, when life is not treating you fairly, when you are struggling with your health, when you face scorn from the unbelieving world around you, when you wonder why bad things can happen to good people, would you just take a few moments to imagine? God’s children have that right! You have that right! Because that is what we are! **We are children of God now and forever.**

But even as we keep our focus on the future, it's important to continue to live this way in the present. We come back down to earth to live out our days. John writes**, "Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as Jesus is pure."**

Children, consciously or unconsciously, imitate their parents. Right? There are certain characteristics that I exhibit because I have learned them from my parents. Children naturally imitate their parents.

Can people tell who your heavenly Father is by taking one look at you? And do you look much like the other children of God that you see in God's family? Is your walk through life straight and true? Can people tell from the smile on your faces that you are radiating with the joy of God in your hearts? When you open your mouth, is your speech characteristic of your Father's word? Is it truthful? Honest? Pure? Kind? Are your desires for heavenly things and not earthly pleasures?

Remember who you are! **You are children of God.** God has purified us with the blood of his Son. He has called us to be his own. He put his name on us in our baptism and made us adopted members of his family. And at the same time that I know that I am God's child, I also want to become more like him every day.

That's why John says, **"Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as Jesus is pure."** In this case, the English verb does not quite catch the flavor of what it says in the Greek. Maybe a better translation would be, "**Everyone who has this hope *keeps on purifying* himself just as Jesus is pure."** As God's spiritual children, we *keep on* becoming more and more like him every day. We *keep on purifying* ourselves, just as he is pure.

What does that mean to "**keep on purifying ourselves**?" It's very simple, really, just not always easy. It's something that we do, or maybe I should say it's something that God works in us by his Spirit, every day.

First, we examine ourselves so that we can see the impurities and the imperfections. We look at how we act and how we talk. We examine our feelings and our attitudes and our desires. Are they godly and godlike? If not, we bring these impurities to the throne of our Father and claim the promises that he has given us. In the first chapter, John wrote, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse (or purify) us from all unrighteousness"** (1 John 1:9). In humbleness and thanks, we determine to rid our life of this sin or that. We cannot tolerate it any longer. It has no place in our lives. Because **we are children of God!** That is what we are!

And if we are unsuccessful today because we are weak, we will look to him for strength tomorrow. And the next day. And the next. And even if in this life we are not able to become just like him in every way, we will not despair. Because in our baptism God promised never to forsake us as his children. And we know that one day, when we are with him in heaven, we shall be just like him! For we shall see him as he is.

Today is ***All Saints Day***. It's not just a commemoration for our loved ones who have already gone to heaven. It's confirmation for you. **"We are children of God now, but what we will be has not yet been revealed."** So, look forward to what's waiting for you. And live how God has made you. **You are the children of God now and forever.** Amen.