

Rev. Lynne Ogren
November 5, 2017

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
All Saints Sunday

1 John 3:1-3 (Matthew 5:1-12)

“See what love the Father has given US, that WE should be called children of God.”

How beautiful that we heard this verse this morning when Cora was presented to the family of God after her baptism! Do you think we planned this...kind of!

Some of our kids are under the impression that only babies are baptized and in the last couple of years that has been the case here at Zion. But kids, people can be baptized at any age. If for some reason it didn't happen when they were little a person can be baptized when they are 6 or 16 or 36 or 96! No matter what the age, at the time of our baptism we are given the name Child of God.

And each Child of God enters into God's family with all the children of God. It's easy to just think about the little ones as children, but the little ones are here to remind us that we are all God's children. All who believe in Christ and are baptized are members of God's family. We are in this life of discipleship together, with God as our loving parent!

Now, why would John need to write that down for the first readers of this letter that was our 2nd reading today? Because there was some sort of dispute. We don't know what that was specifically, but what we do know is that some that once belonged to that faith community left. And John writes to those who remain.

Have you ever been a part of a congregation that had a major issue and some members chose to leave? It's a sad thing when that happens. The church where Eric & I were raised in California, where my mother is still the choir director, is in the midst of conflict right now. Some have chosen to stay and work things out. Some have decided to leave. It is a painful time in their history.

Maybe you haven't experienced major conflict in a particular congregation, but we just made a big deal last weekend of the schism that split the church 500 years ago when Martin Luther spoke out against the church of Rome. Luther didn't so much choose to leave the church; he was kicked out, and many people followed him.

Our ELCA leaders have been careful not to use the word “celebrate” as we approached this year's anniversary of the Reformation. We do not celebrate that the church experienced this kind of division. But we do remember.

We remember that there were abuses in the church at that time. We remember that people had a hard time listening and learning from each other. And now, 500 years later, and especially 50+ years after Vatican II, we also remember how the catholic church (with a small c), the universal church of Jesus Christ, has worked so hard to reform relationships between denominations. We remember God's faithfulness and guidance to help us focus more on what we have in common than on our differences.

“See what love...” The life of those who claim the name “children of God” makes visible the love of God that we embody in the world. We have seen the love the Father has given us in the life, death, and resurrection of God’s Son. We have received this love in Holy Baptism when we were named daughters and sons of the living God. This love is the gift we have been given to share with the world.

It is a love that calls us to action. It is a love that sees the needs and the hurts in the world. It is a love that heals divisions, even if that takes a really long time.

“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.”

We are God’s children NOW. We are God’s saints who are called into service of the gospel from the moment of our baptism. We might not know what that will look like from day to day. But as a community of faith, as God’s children whom God calls together week after week, we are here to equip and encourage and empower one another to make Christ visible to the world.

Jesus shows us what that looks like in our gospel reading today. He gathers with those who are thirsty for words that will heal. And he blesses them. He blesses the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek. He blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, longing for forgiveness and a right relationship with God and with the people they are separated from.

This is the kind of discipleship we are called into by God; to gather with the lost and hurting and to bless them with both our words and our actions.

The Service idea on our Taking Faith Home insert for this All Saints Sunday invites us to pay particular attention this week to the people we know who are grieving the loss of a loved one. It may be a recent loss, or it may be a grief that is still raw even after many years. How might you bless someone in their grief this week, with a card, some flowers, or a visit?

Last week our Confirmation youth visited three of our elder members who were delighted to have someone come and chat with them! Do you have a neighbor like that? We can also provide you with ideas of folks from our congregation to go and see.

This afternoon Roger Woltermann will go to Valle Vista at 1:30 to lead a worship service with the folks there, including Dodie Kamp, one of our Zion members. This first Sunday of the month is also the day that Woody Westburg and Tom Wilson play their guitar and harmonica and sing with the folks at the nursing home at the hospital beginning at 2:00. Maybe some of us could pop in on one of those and join in to visit with those folks today.

“What we do know is this: when Christ is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” As saints of God, God’s precious and beloved children, we put our hope in God’s eternal promises.

But we don't need to wait to enter into our eternal home with God to become saints because we are God's children NOW. The light of God's love can glimmer in our life together even now. And then one day we will gather around the throne of God with all the saints in light!

Thanks be to God! Amen