

## **“We all will die...” 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. 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. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

This is the last Sunday in this Church year. The very end of the Church year. The day when we remember our fellow saints who have already left this world behind and have joined the glorious Church triumphant.

This is the time when we reflect on what is to come and where we are heading. The thing is – we all will die. If there is one certain fact of life, then this is it – we all will most certainly die. Now pause for a second and reflect on this fact.

How does it feel? The fact of death is probably terrifying for most people, something that will end everything we know, something that we have never experienced before, our souls and bodies being violently torn apart.

But what matters more is – what comes after. We have this sense built into us, Solomon called it “eternity in our hearts”, that our existence transcends this age. We see time flowing by, everything changes, including our bodies, but our self-consciousness remains the same. So, what will happen to me after I die?

It depends on who you are. Or otherwise put – what your identity is. And that seems to be the big question of our time. Who am I? Who are you? Or perhaps we should say that this is the great confusion of our time. Who am I?

We live in the society that encourages everyone to be their authentic self, to decide from themselves what they are. It may sound appealing on the surface, like the ultimate freedom, like being your own creator, but it is a direct path to despair and misery. Why so? Because, in reality, we are not our own creators, we are creatures, we can only discover and learn who we are.

And the way to freedom and true happiness leads through learning who we are created to be, what kind of rich and fulfilling relationships and responsibilities we are made for and then – striving to live out our humanity.

The question “who am I?” is closely linked with another question – “who is your god?” Because it is our gods that determine who we are. And by saying “our god” I don’t necessarily mean some deity.

I meant a god in the same sense as Dr Luther spoke about it in his Large Catechism explaining the 1st Commandments: “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe [in something] him

from the [whole] heart; [...] now, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god.” It can help you to identify your god if you try to fill the gap in the following sentences. “There is no reason for me to live if I lose...”. “I will only feel good and happy, and joyful, and secure if I can get...”.

Think about this! What is your god? There are so many candidates. It can be money and wealth, it can be sexual pleasures, it can be relationships and people in your life, it can be power, or fame, or accomplishments.... It can be even politics and state as it can be lately observed more and more.

Now, see, it is your god/s that determine your identity. Perhaps your identity, worth and meaning of life is defined by your riches or success? Perhaps by your sexual life and pursuit of pleasure? Perhaps by your career, recognition, or someone you love and adore?

“If only I can get ... [whatever your god is] ... I would feel great, confident, accomplished, safe and happy.” “If I lose ... [whatever your god is] ... then there is no reason for me to live.” Your god defines your identity.

Let’s get back to our initial topic. We all will die... how will your god help you? How does your god prepare you for what is to come? Does he? Blessed you are, if you are a Christian, for then the following applies to you:

**“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”** Wow... this is our God. He is not self-chosen. He can not disappear, we can’t lose Him, He can’t be taken away.

Because He is the true God, who comes to us, His little, rebellious creatures, and reveals Himself, and reveals to us the most exciting reality. The Creator of all things visible and invisible is also our Father in Heaven.

Through His Son Jesus Christ we are welcomed into His family, we are embraced in the divine fellowship with our Father and with Jesus, our Master. Now, because of our union with Jesus, God calls us ... His children.

He makes us His children. And that it our core identity, unchanging and everlasting. It is not something self-chosen, for no one can choose their parents. God the Father Himself has chosen you, and He has adopted you, and now you are fully a member of His family and co-heir with Jesus Christ.

All of this is true already now, but what is yet to come! We are all going to die and then... **“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.”**

You are God’s children now. Take a moment and meditate on it! Let it sink in! That is how God the Father sees you and relates to you. You are already a new creation under this old shell, with a new heart, a new being, and with this new identity – a child of God the Father.

For now, we can't see it, we can't perceive it with our sense, even if that is true that we can witness many changes in those who are made God's children. They are transformed, the Holy Spirit changes them, fills them with joy, and so on...

But what is to come?! Brace yourselves... when Jesus returns in His divine glory, when this world as we know it ceases to exist, then we shall be made like Him, and we shall see Him as He is. And we will also see all the saints...

We will see Jan Bachmann, as always smiling, we will see Colin Brine, saved by grace and prayers of his loved ones. We will see Grace Rooke, as always proud and caring about her family, we will see Erna Renner, faithful as always.

And Lita Schirmer, one of the most diligent readers of my sermons, and Wendy Schiller, always optimistic, and Joan Schulz, organizing things, and Esther Flinn, and Leslie Kohlhausen, and Myrtle Parbs, and every other saint who has departed from this life in the true faith.

All of them in beautiful, strong, incredibly attractive, new, perfect resurrected bodies. Remember the promise of the Holy Spirit: "You will be like Jesus." I wish I could explain what it means, I wish we could experience a glimpse of it.

Now, **"everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure."** As we discussed it before, our hopes, our identities determine how we live. As children of God, who hope in Jesus and we strive to purify ourselves.

But what does that mean, how exactly do we do it? We can find the answer earlier in 1 John 1. **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."** (1 John 1:9)

This is how we are to purify ourselves. This is how we are to live as children of our Father. This is why we need the gift of forgiveness, the gift of confession and absolution ... we need it so much.

For this is how we nourish and cultivate our relationships with our God. When the Triune God draws near, when the light of God's Word shines into our hearts, it reveals our sinful nature, all the ugliness and impurity in us. It exposes our false gods from whom we expect all good things, it reveals our false sources of identity and meaning and safety.

At the same time the Spirit of God continues to bring us deeper and deeper into this wonderful fellowship with the Father and the Son and helps us to grow into appreciation and wonder on **"what kind of love the Father has given to us."**

And once we experience His grace, once we get the taste of what it means to be a child of God, what the Father has prepared for us, and what joy and comfort and peace these relationships can bring us already in this life – we want to turn away from everything that stands between this marvellous God and us.

The closer He draws to us, the more passionate we are about being purified from all our sinfulness, so that one day we can be like Jesus. When it will be fully revealed not only who our God is, but also – who we will be.

See, for us, Christians, the children of God, the end is not the end. Not at all. The end of the Church year reminds us about the wonderful hope, about the firm and unshakable promise where the Holy Spirit in us is God's guaranty.

We will die, sure, and that may be scary, but it also will be the beginning of something breathtakingly beautiful and exciting. That will be our reunion with our loved ones who have departed in the faith, and the first steps in our new life with Jesus Christ, where we will live and reign in sinless new world with our glorious Redeemer forever.

This God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is a gracious God. He desires that everyone would accept His kind invitation. Everyone... He wants everyone to enter His eternal feast, and if you haven't responded to His invitation yet, don't delay – let Him bless you from now on.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good to have such Father and be loved by Him. It is good to be called His children, and this is who you are.

Amen.