

## **We Will Be Like Him**

(Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, November 1, 2009)

I John 3:1-3 <sup>3:1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

John 14:1-9a, 18-19, 25-27 <sup>1</sup>“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going.” <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know<sup>£</sup> my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

<sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” <sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. <sup>18</sup>“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>25</sup>“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. <sup>27</sup>Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

“All Saints Day” became a holiday in the church calendar 1,174 years ago. In the year 835, Pope Gregory set November 1 as the date for the remembrance of all saints in all churches. In those days, holy days were observed with a high mass, or worship service. On December 25<sup>th</sup>, the special mass was called the “Christ mass”, or as we now say, Christmas. November 1, the special mass for all saints, or all those who had died and whose remembrance was being hallowed, was called “Hallow Mass” or again shortened to Hallowmas.

At the same time of the year, the ancient Druids of England observed a festival, called Samhein. They conceded All Saints Day to the Church observations, but they held to a belief that the evening before Hallowmas the spirits of the dead came back to revisit their earthly homes, something like making one last visit before going to be at peace with God. So as dusk fell on the evening before Hallowmas, they would light huge bonfires to ward off the spirits, particularly those who might have a grudge, or want revenge, and some people would parade in costume to attract these evil spirits and draw them out of town. So although the non-Christians conceded the day, All Hallows or Hallowmas, to the Church, the evening before, called Halloween, remained very much a pagan festival.

Through the centuries paganism has really been watered down. For the most part, we no longer have pagan holidays – we have secular holidays. In our American culture there is only one that still holds on to the symbols of their pagan past, and that is Halloween. It is the one time each year when many people think of ghosts, witches and evil spirits – although we tend to wink at the true power of these spirits, and we tend to say that the mischief we see all about – such as smashed pumpkins – are most likely the activity of spirited youth rather than unleashed spirits.

Halloween is observed by many communities, including our own, but the observation of Hallowmas, or All Saints Day, is forgotten by many people and even by many churches. Our ancestors in Germany have done better than we have in remembering the original, Christian purpose of this holiday. There the observation of All Saints Day, called Totenfest, remains an annual observation in most communities. Even through the reformation, when much of the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church was discarded, the church and community continued to observe Totenfest, or all Saints Day. Church bells ring to call the people to remembrance, and neighbors go to the houses where a person had died, bringing flowers as a gift.

We have not adopted the complete German practice of Totenfest here at Peace Church, but I do want you to understand this very important and reverent part of our heritage, and I want you to take time today to remember those who were dear to you, and who have died. I am not doing this out of any sense of morbidity, or to frighten or depress anyone. I am calling you to remember, with love... and with faith... and with hope.

To confirm this hope, I have read the Gospel lesson that is often included in funeral services, the lesson where Jesus promises that there is a place in heaven, a room for those who believe in him. The disciples didn't understand this very well. Thomas admitted to Jesus, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus responded that **he** was the way. He told his disciples that the way to the Father was through him, and that if you know Jesus, you know the Father and have seen the Father.

Through the centuries, great Christian theologians have found wonderful ways to restate what Jesus said. Some have said that God is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. At the beginning of his Gospel, John says that Jesus is the Word of God, the Word through whom creation was made, and through whom light itself comes into the world. But I suspect there are many in our world today who think more like Philip. We want to jump right to the bottom line. We don't like being told that this is just a matter of faith or trust in God, but we would like some explanations, something concrete, or like Philip, we would like to see God, and then we will believe.

Jesus seems almost weary as he answers Philip, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." And with these words, Philip, and most of us, are left dangling in a world of not yet. We do not yet have the full revelation of eternity, but we do have the reassurance of eternal life with God. We do not yet see God, but we have Jesus' promise that we will be with him, in the presence of God. We cannot yet understand the glory that will be revealed in eternity, but we are assured that that glory is ours.

It may all seem a bit mystical, but we have Jesus' clear promise in verse 19, "In a little while the world will no longer see me, but YOU will see me; because I live, you also will live." As we remember our loved ones who have departed from this life, these are words that bring us assurance. these are words that bring us hope.

The people that John wrote to, in his first letter, must have had some of the same questions and doubts that dance around the edges of our minds today. And this is why, in the third chapter of his letter, John writes, "What we will be has not yet been revealed." In other words, we don't have all the answers yet. We are reassured that we are God's children, and we have the hope that as his children, he will call us home, to be with him. And if we are God's children, we are also guaranteed a room in God's house, if we only believe and trust in him, we will also be like Christ. As our loved ones have gone to God, so shall we, in faith, go to be with God, and we will be like him.

Let us find comfort in the words of God as we remember our loved ones today, and let us find hope in the promises of God that are ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.