October 31/November 1, 2026
Saints Triumphant Sunday
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church
1 John 3:1-3
God's Child Now and Forever

Certain types of relationships in our lives can cause confusion. Consider an employee who personally gets invited out for drinks by his boss. The employee seems to have more confirmation that his boss is also a very good friend. But, when the employee arrives, all his coworkers are also there. Did the boss invite him because he's his friend or simply because he wanted to treat all his subordinate employees after a good quarter? Or, what about the young man who has spent hours hanging out with a young woman. He would love to consider the two of them in a relationship and work toward marriage. But, he's unsure if the she feels the same way. She might just enjoy his company as a close friend and confidant. Understanding where a relationship may be in this life can be confusing.

There should be no confusion when it comes to the relationship between God and his followers. God has told those who trust in him that there are many types of relationships they have with him, and they are all positive. There is the marital relationship: Jesus as the bridegroom and the Church as the bride. Jesus calls his followers his brothers and sisters. Consider also the tender shepherd and sheep relationship that exists between Jesus and you. How wonderful it is to know we have these pleasant, loving relationships with God.

The Apostle John adds one more type of relationship: Father and child. **"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"** How comforting and magnificent it is to know we have this tight-knit relationship with our heavenly Father. God tells the honest truth when he calls you his child. That truth is present reality and will remain true forever.

And, yet, you might be confused about this relationship right now. From your perspective, God might be sending you mixed signals. God is all-powerful. Nothing can stop him. He has everything at his disposal. So, if I'm a child of this almighty Father, am I set for life? Can I expect such a pleasant, wonderful life?

Think about that from an earthly parent's viewpoint. Have there been things you couldn't do for your child because of limited resources or wisdom or power? An adventure was out of budget. You were too slow to react to the door closing on your child's fingers. How far would you go to make sure your child didn't suffer or get hurt? How far would you go to make sure your child had what they sometimes wanted and always needed without making your child feel spoiled? We'd go quite a long ways, sacrificing a lot of our own wants and desires. But, there's always more we'd like to be able to do for our children.

So, how awesome it is to know our God is our heavenly Father. All-powerful, all-knowing, always there. We're set for life already as his child. And, that's where the confusion about this relationship can set in. If I'm a child already now of this great God, why is he sending mixed signals? Why did he let that suffering into my life? Why don't I have more? Why do I still struggle? Can't God do more for me if he's my Father? Is this what I should expect as God's child?

Did you catch some of those phrases from the first reading and the gospel? In Revelation, John saw God's children in heaven. But, listen again to what those children of God experienced on earth. **"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation."** You are God's child now, but you are not immune to the extreme tribulations of these last days leading up to Christ's return for judgment. As God's child now, you endure wars and rumors of wars. You survive during the hardships of natural disasters. You witness and are even subject to the growing coldness of people's hearts.

Now, hear the phrases again from Jesus as he describes you, child of God now. He describes you as **"poor in spirit; who mourn; who are persecuted because of righteousness."** He says people **"insult you, persecute**

you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you *because of me."* Yes, as God's child, Jesus is saying this is what you will go through already now.

These aren't mixed signals about your relationship with your heavenly Father. This is the reality not just of living in a sinful world, but living as a child of God in a sinful world. Why? Because of something else John says in our lesson. **"The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."** The world will cause you trouble. You're not going to get special treatment from the world because you are a child of God. In fact, you might get worse treatment because of that.

So, what does God do about that? If he's our powerful Father, why doesn't he step in? Isn't he willing to go as far as he can to protect us, to make us successful, and to keep us from evil? John said, **"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"** Some love the Father lavishes on us when we go through such tribulation, and mourn, and are persecuted. I wish my Father would go further for me.

Back up for a second. Just consider this phrase: child of God. How did that truth come to be? Let's go back to John's words he recorded for us in Revelation. **"They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."** How far did your heavenly Father go for you? He sacrificed his only begotten Son on the cross. How far did your brother Jesus, the Son of God, go for you? He willingly endured the greatest tribulation and suffering so you don't have to. How did it happen that you are a child of God now? Your God went to the greatest extreme for you so you can be considered blessed no matter what, so you can be protected from the greatest evil of all in hell, so you can receive the reward kept safe in heaven for you.

These are not mixed signals concerning your relationship with your heavenly Father. No, these are situations which he now uses to draw you closer to him. A child might be upset at his dad for not getting him the newest toy. He slams his bedroom door behind him as he pouts in his room. Only a few minutes later, the thunder rattles the sky, and the child comes running to his dad for comfort. Your gracious Father in heaven uses suffering in this world and in your life to draw you closer to him. Because in him you find lasting comfort and relief. In your heavenly Father you find the eternal promise of heaven. God doesn't keep all suffering away, but he does provide his strength to get through.

Be assured: you are a child of God already now. Despite the sufferings, despite the pains, despite the sins, despite the sorrows, you are a child of God. Jesus assured that on the cross. Don't let the mortality and tribulations of this world fool you. Allow God's powerful truth to instill confidence in you. So, we go throughout this life armed for battle knowing nothing changes this truth: you are a child of God now. *Let's sing about that now in verses 3-5 of hymn 880.*

Any type of confusion on our part about our relationship with God has been removed by the truth of God's Word. You are a child of God. If that's true now despite all the consequences of sin around us, how much truer is it that you will be a child of God forever in heaven? John writes, **"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."**

As much as we never saw Jesus walk this earth, even more so are we not literal eyewitnesses of the glory we'll enjoy forever. So, why would we place such hope in something beyond imagination? Again, it's because we are children of the Father. And this inheritance, though beyond comprehension, is already ours.

Consider it this way. You've hired an architect to build your dream home. You didn't need to spare any expenses. This architect is the best in the world. 5-star reviews across the board. Never even a single negative review. You've given him your idea of your home. What you want and where you want it. But, you've left the majority of the work up to him. You're not sure exactly how it will look, but you know it will look magnificent. You hope for the future of this new home with joy, not worry. Then, it's finally revealed to you and it exceeds

your expectations and imagination. You knew this was coming even before you saw it because it was promised to you.

So it is with our heavenly home and perfect inheritance. Your heavenly Father has made heaven possible for you as his child by sending Jesus and the Holy Spirit into your life, and bringing the Son back to heaven to prepare a place for you. The Father has given you snippets of information of what it will all be like, but you won't fully understand or see until the end. And, that's ok, because you live each day as a child of God knowing you'll enjoy this reality one day as a child of God forever.

We don't know the full glory now because we have no experience of it. But, this much we know: Jesus in his full glory will give us such glory. Then, when we are able to see him face-to-face in heaven and on the last day, we will experience his glory as our own. Then, we will perfectly at all times act like God's holy children. Our joy and laughter and praise will not be held back. But, while we reside in our sinful bodies and in this decaying world, we must wait for these experiences. But, we wait in joyful anticipation. All because we are children of the Father.

We wait in joyful anticipation just as fellow saints of old waited in joyful anticipation to enjoy eternal rest. While they who have died in the Lord are still waiting to enjoy the full glory that will be revealed in their resurrected bodies, they are already enjoy wait they hoped for in Jesus. **"They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"**

Keeping that future reality in mind gives us two-fold comfort. It comforts us when loved ones die in the Lord because we know they are at home forever. It comforts us now and reminds us that our heavenly Father has gone the full length for us to make us children now and forever so that when we arrive at our eternal home, there is no more yearning for more. There is only rejoicing and enjoyment every single moment of eternity. Amen.