

## "Now, But Not Yet"

1 John 31-3

November 6, 2016

All Saints' Day

Two questions were probably on your mind as you came to church today. First, did your pastor survive the World Series mentally, physically, and emotionally? Second, will your pastor be able to resist mentioning the Chicago Cubs and their World Series victory somewhere in the sermon today? The answer to these questions is "yes" and "know."

Since Wednesday, I have been thinking about the similarities in being a Cubs' fan and the journey we have made and being a child of God and the journey we make as children of God.

I became a Cubs' fan in the summer of 1969 as a result of a trip to Wrigley Field in Chicago by the baseball league in which I played. I was excited to see Willie Mays (my favorite player) and the San Francisco Giants play the Cubs that day. But, when the Cubs won that day, for some reason known only to God, I fell in love with the Cubs and became a fan for life.

While becoming a Cubs' fan was easy, being a Cubs' fan is not easy. There's a lot of pain and suffering from following the Cubs. There was disappointment and sadness when things didn't go the way I wanted (which was most of the time) as the Cubs would often lose and lose some more. And, when they DID win, they would end up choking at just the right time.

The reaction from fans of other teams was not helpful either. Some felt sorry for us for following the Cubbies, those "lovable losers". Many just laughed and made fun of us Cub fans for following the Cubs. It was as if the Cubs weren't a legitimate major league team because they appeared to be so bad and we weren't real baseball fans because we followed such a team.

Yet, I and many other Cub fans continued to follow and believe that someday the Cubs would achieve victory, change everything, and make everything we had to endure worthwhile. We looked forward to sharing their victory and feeling pretty good about things.

All of that came to pass last Wednesday evening. Unless you've been living under a rock lately, you know that the Cubs won the World Series championship last Wednesday. When the last out was made, it unleashed an indescribable and overwhelming joy on Cub fans like myself which is hard to explain to non-Cub fans. You saw the delirious reaction of Cubs' fans in Chicago and across the country. But to experience it personally brought tears to my eyes and gave me the greatest sports-related thrill and excitement I've ever had. It's impossible to explain. But it made up for all past suffering and pain and it gave hope and optimism for the future.

This is similar to how our text describes the lives of God's children – His saints. However, instead of we choosing to become children of God like I chose to be a fan, God chooses us to become His children. Why? Because we are born apart from God because of our sin and are his enemies and therefore are not, by nature, His children.

But St. John in our text encourages us to "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." We are children of God because, out of His great love, God declared us to be so. He sent His Son, Jesus, to earn that status for us. Jesus lived the holy life which God expected of us. Jesus died the death which our sins deserved. Because of that, God forgives all of your sins, declares you to be holy in His eyes, and calls you His dear children.

But being God's children, as good as that sounds, is neither hunky nor dory. It's like being a Cubs' fan. It's not easy. There's a lot of disappointment and sadness because things often don't go the way WE think they should go for the children of God. Life is not noticeably better for us as children of God compared with the lives of non-believers. In fact, life can often be worse for us. Instead of living "the victorious life" that some preachers tell us exists if we have enough faith, we suffer in our finances, our health, our careers, and so on just like everyone else.

The reaction of other people to us as children of God, like the reaction of other fans to Cubs' fans, is not helpful. They don't see us as being anything special (like children of God). But that shouldn't surprise us. In our text, John reminds us, "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him." When Jesus walked the earth, people did not recognize Him as the Son of God. Why should we be surprised that they don't recognize us as children of God?

Many people choose to feel sorry for us for following a “loveable loser” like Jesus who, people think, while being a good teacher and a nice guy, was still reviled, rejected, and eventually crucified. People often laugh at us and make fun of us for our Biblical doctrine and morality. People treat us as if we don’t deserve a place in the public square of ideas because we follow Jesus. We are shamed and threatened by the accusation that what we believe and how we live will end us up “on the wrong side of history.”

Yet we press on as unrecognized saints and ridiculed children of God. We believe that God will achieve victory, change everything, and make everything we had to endure worthwhile. We look forward to sharing His victory and finally feeling pretty good about things. But we base that, not on blind optimism (as some would accuse Cubs’ fans of having) but on a rock solid promise from the Word of God. John writes, “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.”

When Jesus returns, what joy there will be for the children of God – for you and me! When Jesus appears in power and glory, our anonymity as children of God will disappear. No more pity and feeling sorrow! No more ridicule and rejection! No more loss and shame! We will be like Him in power and glory. Truly realize what this means! Paul describes it this way to the Philippians: “We await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21)

Imagine the great joy when the hidden saints of God are revealed! We teach that joy. We talk about that joy. But do we ever contemplate that joy? Recall the greatest joy in your life – the day of your wedding, the birth of your child, even a victory in a baseball game – and magnify it by eternity. Then you’ll be able to approach that great joy when Jesus appears and we become like Him.

What do we do until then? A lot of Cubs’ fans are asking similar questions. We are notorious for complaining about losing and waiting for next year. But the Cubs have won and next year is now. So, where do we go from here? Cubs’ fans face the future with legitimate hope and, for the first time, genuine confidence. We will win!

As children of God, we do the same. We’ve been redeemed by the perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. This has been verified by God the Father in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. God has declared us to be His children because of Jesus in our baptism and, we have the promise of resurrection and restoration also because of our baptism. Where do we go from here?

We have legitimate hope in Christ Jesus for the future. That means we have genuine confidence as we live and wait. Unlike any sporting event where the favored team can always lose, we know that Jesus Christ has already won over sin, death, and hell and that we share in His victory. We know that, when He returns, we shall see Him as He is and we will be as He is.

And, because of that hope for the future, John says we live in purity in the present. He writes, “And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” This means we choose the pure path, the way of God’s commands, lest we distract ourselves from the way to the final victory that we have desired, hoped for, and are now waiting for. And, when we defile ourselves, we come to receive God’s gifts – His Absolution, His Gospel, and His Supper – that we might remain pure and ready for His return.

Even before this year, I thought the Chicago Cubs was a good Lutheran team. They were poster boys for a theology of the cross which emphasizes the necessity of suffering in a Christian’s life. The Cubs always emphasized Law and Grace – especially when they had 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman Vance Law and 1<sup>st</sup> baseman Mark Grace on the team in the late 1980’s. Now they show us the value of hope and patience. As a kid, I always had the hope of a Cubs’ victory in a World Series but not yet the victory. Now I have the victory and the long wait and everything that went with it was worth it. Even more important, as Christians, we now have the hope as children of God, but not yet the glory. One day, we will share in Jesus’ glory when He returns. The great and inexpressible joy we experience at that time will show that the long wait and everything that went with it was well worth it!

Amen