

What We Will Be

1 John 3:1-3

It seems like we've run out of ideas for movies and TV shows. At least, that's the way it looks when you see how many remakes and prequels and sequels there are. Instead of coming up with new ideas, new characters, new places, new stories, we just keep seeing the same ones over and over again. Better Call Saul was a prequel to the series Breaking Bad, and showed the origin of the sleazy lawyer. Star Trek: Strange New Worlds shows the adventures of Spock and Uhura and other characters before James T Kirk becomes captain of the Starship Enterprise. HBO's House of the Dragon takes place a couple hundred years before Game of Thrones, and so features some of the same places and characters from the same houses as the original. Amazon Prime hoped to catch the same sort of magic with their Rings of Power series, a prequel set long before the Lord of the Rings. Over on Disney Plus, the series Andor is a prequel to the prequel film Rogue One, which took place just before Star Wars: A New Hope.

We know how these stories end. We know what will happen to these characters in the end. Why do we keep returning to these ideas or shows?

During the last few years, the word unprecedented has almost become overused. We've got through so many rapid changes. Plagues and riots, insurrections and inflation, virtual everything, all have changed how we view the world. Some have seen a tendency, then, for people to stick with the familiar. Stick with the comfortable. Stick with what you know. When you're dealing with so much unknown, it helps to have something you know. It helps to watch or read something where you know the ending. It helps when you know what will be.

These last years have also reminded us of what is coming. We know what we will be. Dust you are, and to dust you shall return. We're surrounded by the reminders that we shall all die. We're reminded of what awaits us when we watch the news, or get a phone call that the cancer is back, or read the obituaries in the paper, or watch the falling leaves. Even as we admire the beauty of the leaves changing color, we know that they will fall, and that, cut off from the trees that give them life, die. Cute ghosts and fake blood over teenage zombies and vampires may try to make us laugh at death, but they, too, point us to what we will be. That someday, we will hear those words intoned over our final resting place. That we will be buried. We know what we will be.

As John writes his letters towards the end of the 1st century A.D., the early Christians are waiting and wondering, facing an uncertain world. John is the last living apostle of Jesus, the last of the twelve who'd walked with Jesus during his earthly ministry. And the people wondered what would become of them as the generations shifted, as persecutions arose again, as death awaited them.

In the midst of that uncertainty, John reminds his readers that they do have a promise they can trust in. They are the children of God because of what Jesus did for them on the cross. They are the children of God, even when the surrounding culture doesn't recognize them as such. They are the children of God, which gives them purpose and value. They are the children of God, which gives them a place in God's family, and unites them with their brothers and sisters in the faith throughout all time and all space. Children of God is what they are, and what they will be.

The same promises hold true for us, as well. How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! We were made a part of God's family through baptism, when we became God's children. That is a certainty. That is not only what we will be, that is what we are. It gives us purpose and value and an identity found in something outside of us, not based on what we do. It is true that we are children of God even when we don't feel close to God. We are children of God not because of anything we do, but because of what God has done for us.

If we are all the children of God, then we have other promises, too. We have our brothers and sisters in Christ gathered around us. As the children of God, we know that we always have a place we will belong. We know that through all the changes and challenges of life, we will always be a part of God's family, and that God will be with us whatever we do and wherever we go. But even as we know what we will be, what the end of every life is, our future can still be uncertain.

College students (and their parents) struggle with same question. "What will you be?" The question stretches back even further, as children who dress as firemen or astronauts or ballerinas for Halloween are asked if that's what they want to be when they grow up. But even when you're older and think you have life figured out, the question still remains. Those who are back for homecoming probably couldn't have predicted all of the twists and turns that happened after your time here. As you move from job to retirement, from out in the country to closer into town, from your own home to a nursing home or assisted living place, the question still is asked. What will you be?

The present reality is that we are children of God, but that is not the end of the story. In the time between the comings of Christ, in this time

of now and not yet, when what we shall be has not yet appeared, yet we know our identity as children of God, we live in faith and trust. We know what we are, and we know what we shall be. We know we shall be like Jesus. The process that began at our baptism that will reach its fulfillment when Christ returns or calls us home will keep shaping us to be like Jesus.

If the future were simply the sum of present trends, death is the end every time. But because Jesus is our past, present, and future, we are God's children now.

In some ways, we don't yet know what we will be. What we will be has not yet been made known. But we do know part of what we will be, we have a glimpse of what we will be. Out on the horizons of the future, we know what we will be. We know that when Jesus appears, we shall be like him. We shall see him as he is.

We don't know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future. We know with all the saints who have looked to Christ, those who've gone before us in the faith, we see our crucified and risen Lord drawing near to meet us.

We may not know what we will be. We don't know all of the directions and detours that our journey through life will go through. We don't know all the details of who we will be. But what we do know, the promise that we can trust in through all the chances and changes of life, is that we are children of God, loved by a Father who will never let us go.

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Memorial Lutheran Church and Student Center
All Saints Sunday (Observed)
November 6, 2022