

Beloved Children...Right Now

When things are going good in life, it's very easy to *live in the moment*. In fact, when things are *really* good with us, we tend to forget all about both the past and the future. As you well know (most likely from your own life experiences), such a *carpe diem*, present-tense only kind of mindset can prove *quite problematic*. Many a person caught up only in the moment winds up making some really stupid mistakes because they don't pay attention to the past. *They don't learn from their history*. Not surprisingly, those stupid mistakes also have a direct influence on the future. Those stupid mistakes carry with them some rather tough consequences, but nobody ever thinks about the future consequences when things are going so great and you're caught up in the moment. Like I said, when things are going good, it's very easy to live only in the moment—only in the present—with the past and future not even on our radar.

Of course... there is the flip-side to this. When life goes south; when things get tough and suffering enters into the picture, thoughts of past and future tend to come flooding in. We lament “the good old days.” If only we could go back to the good old days, right? We dream about better days to come. Things will turn around. Just gut it out. Brighter days await. Everyone does this. We try to *cover over and alleviate* our present sufferings by looking elsewhere; looking to the past and/or to the future. Understand: This isn't *necessarily* a bad thing. In fact, such a focus on the past and the future can be very good; very cathartic and therapeutic. After all, it can be very easy to get *overwhelmed* by all the present-tense pain and suffering that's a part of everyday life in this fallen and sinful world of ours. *(It should come as no surprise that serious mental health issues and suicide rates have skyrocketed since COVID reared its ugly head, and those numbers continue to rise as things continue to get progressively and exponentially worse. *But 2022 is gonna be better, right? It's gonna be different!)*

Do you see what I mean? Without that *therapeutic* vision backwards and forwards, one could easily be consumed by the pain and suffering of the present. Depression sets in. Hope becomes fleeting, if not lost all together. Our drive, our desire to keep pushing forward can dwindle and die. Why bother? Why try? Even the faith of a “good Christian” can fall victim to present sufferings and tribulations. *It happens all the time.*

It is because of this ever-present danger—the danger of losing faith—that St. John wrote letters to Christians and their congregations who were experiencing the *trials, tribulations, and sufferings* of being a faithful Christian in a very unfaithful and dark world. Consider these first words of the Epistle lesson. John reminds the hearer of love the Father has already given us; love that made us His children. He also points the hearer to the future joy of the resurrection, when we will arise and

be with Christ. We do the same exact thing at every single funeral. Yet, John doesn't ignore the present. In the midst of all this focus on the past and focus on the future, John *also* directs the people to the present. "*Beloved, we are God's children now.*"

My friends: Was Immanuel—God with us—only applicable when Jesus walked the earth two thousand years ago? Is salvation merely a historical event that happened one Friday/Sunday in the past, in a far away land almost two thousand years ago? Does the joy and peace of Christ *only* reside in the unforeseen future? Is the assurance of salvation something that only resides on the other side of the heavenly gates? ***Absolutely not!*** As baptized children of God, we have a ***present-tense*** joy and peace and blessed assurance that surpasses all human understanding. How often we forget that. These past many months are proof! When trouble arises, how often we slip into "default mode," lamenting the "good old days" while longing for better days to come. ***How often we fail to recognize and rejoice in the joy and peace and truth of Immanuel in our present lives; in our very midst.***

Even though we reside in a fallen and sinful world; even though the world looks at us and continues to mock us and persecute us, as baptized and redeemed children of God, we are saints ***right now!*** "*Blessed are*" All those Beatitude declarations of blessedness are present-tense realities. We are called "blessed" by God right now! Ours ***IS*** the kingdom of heaven, right now. God is reigning and ruling right now! ***It doesn't look that way though, does it?*** It doesn't look like God is ruling and reigning over this messed up world. We know that on Judgment Day all this wickedness and misery will be put down, but for right now it seems like we're on our own, and we're losing the fight.

O ye of little faith! Look to that cross. That's Jesus ruling over sin, death, and the devil. That's Jesus triumphing. "*It is finished!*" Jesus has already won, and it is here—***present tense***—in His means of grace—His Word and Sacraments—that He continues to reign and rule and triumph in the midst of this fallen and sinful world. It is here—in and through these means of grace—that our triumphant Lord Christ ***continues*** to bestow the fruits of His blood-bought victory to us ***in the present***. Honestly: Do you think things might be different if people could actually see (or at least understand and believe) what's going on here? The reason the world doesn't know us is because it doesn't know Him. You know... maybe the reason we suffer and struggle in doubt and despair; maybe the reason we so easily wander away or quickly lose hope when we start to feel the weight of the crosses we're given to bear in this fallen and sinful world is because we don't know Him and His Immanuel peace and grace as well as we think we do. The wise ones will repent of this truth. Those who don't... Lord, have mercy!

Do you want peace and assurance? ***You don't need a prescription; i.e., "here's what you need to do. You just gotta...!"*** The world is already filled with people giving out all kinds of prescriptions, especially in these past many months, medicinal, material, as well as "spiritual." Everyone seems to think they can cure what ails you, and yet none of these self-proclaimed "good physicians and healers" ever seem to point to the Good Physician! ***You don't need a prescription; i.e., "here's what you gotta do."*** Rather, hear the Good News of your description—God's description of you, in Christ. Consider how God sees you—right now, in Christ and through Christ.

Look no further than Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. The water and blood that flowed from Christ's side at crucifixion so long ago continues to flow to you in the present in order to give you peace and joy and forgiveness and everlasting life. Baptized into Christ, God sees you as ***completely*** covered over and sopping wet in the blood-soaked baptismal robes of Christ's perfect righteousness... right now. Baptized into Christ, our heavenly Father looks to us and sees Christ. He sees His "holy ones." (That's what the actual Greek word means: "holy one.") Through the baptismal washing of water and the Word, God has made you holy and righteous in His sight. You have been adopted into God's holy household. By virtue of your baptism into Christ, you are a holy child of God. It's not a future-tense thing, as if you will ***someday*** become holy or ***someday*** become a child of God. Through faith, you have the ever-present joy and peace of knowing that you have ***already*** been ***declared "holy"*** in God's eyes. You stand before God right now, holy and righteous in His sight, not because you've earned it with good and saintly behavior, but because Christ Jesus earned it for you in His death and resurrection. This past reality (*crucifix/baptism*)—this all-redeeming, death-and-resurrection reality—should mean something to you. It should affect and influence your present words and deeds. This future tense resurrection reality should mean something to you. This (the present) isn't the end of the story! The best is still yet to come! What's the worst thing you can do to me? Make me wake up in heaven?! ***Still, don't ever lose sight of who you are right now, in the present. Don't ever lose sight of WHOSE you are, right now, in the present.***

Let that sink in. No matter how bad things may seem right now, or how dark and uncertain the future may seem to be, ***it is finished in Christ and because of Christ.*** No matter what this world throws at you, you belong to Christ, and this same Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth, continues to come to you to comfort you, assure you, to dry your tears, to nourish you, and to shelter you with His presence. Your Lord never hits the snooze button. He's never too sick or too busy to be here for you. He never has something better or more important to do. ***"Take and eat. Take and drink. This is My body and My blood, given and shed for you."***

Look to this altar/rail. The saints in heaven, as Revelation tells us, are forever gathered around Christ. Where Christ is there is heaven. ***Folks: Here is***

Christ. Here is where heaven is meeting earth! The Lamb of God, the same Lamb of God who all those heavenly saints are gathered around in festal worship and praise, comes and dwells in your midst with you. This place is made holy, not because of us and what we do, but because of Christ and His holy presence. Standing in the presence of Christ, we are standing on holy ground. It is here that He calls you to the foot of His throne; to His feast table, where angels, archangels, and all the sainted company of heaven are gathered. It is here, in the present, that He sets His feast of eternal life before you; ***a foretaste of the heavenly feast to come.*** He gives it [Himself] to you and bids you eat and drink, for the forgiveness of all your sin; for the peace that passes and surpasses all understanding.

I know you already know all this, but still... ***how often we forget.*** How often we take for granted. How often we ignore or overlook all this present-tense, Christ-centered blessedness and glory staring us in the face. ***Folks: Here is Christ. Here is where heaven is meeting earth. Here is where angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven are gathered. Why would you NOT flock here each and every chance you could? How can you not rejoice? What more reason do you need?***

Folks: Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, ***presently in your presence.*** Here is God's free and unmerited gift of salvation in the flesh... for you. "See what kind of love the Father has given to us." See and rejoice! Rejoice and give thanks to God for the saints of the past; give thanks for the future bliss that awaits us and all the saints in resurrection glory in heaven... ***but don't lose sight of the blessedness and holiness that is ours right now in the present in and because of our very present and gracious God and Lord.*** Rejoice with all the saints—in heaven and on earth—for you are blessed (present-tense) and yours is (present-tense) the kingdom of heaven.

May this Christ-centered, ever-present reality guard and keep your hearts and minds in Him, now and into all eternity. **AMEN.**