

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 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. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It has been my custom, for as long as I can remember to encourage the members of the congregation to take up the challenge of reading through the Bible in a year or in two years. We provide reading outlines that can be very helpful, and over the years I rejoice that many members have accepted that challenge, and rejoice in the fact that there were many members who met their goal. Others did not get through the whole bible in the year, but continued to read through it on a regular basis. As we draw near to the beginning of a new church year, I encourage you to consider that challenge again. We will make sure reading guides are available, but I will also point out that *The Lutheran Study Bible* includes a two year bible reading plan in the resource material.

There are various ways of going about reading the Bible, each with its own merits. There are, however, some challenges that face us when we simply try to read it cover to cover. We often get bogged down in the genealogical sections. There are more than a few of these in Scripture; early in Genesis we read of Adam's descendants, down to Noah. There is a long list of the names of those who came out of Egypt, all the families that were descended from Jacob; and a chronicle of the people in (strangely enough) 1 Chronicles. Matthew and Luke both have genealogies of Jesus' human ancestry, with Luke tracing it all the way back to Adam—or, more precisely, to God Himself.

Most people are interested in their own family tree, but we are often bored by the dead wood of other people's families. If you have ever read this in the King James Version, you know how hard it can be: ***“Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;”*** (Matthew 1:2–4, KJV) and on and on and on. It does seem a little tedious, doesn't it?

As we recently shared with our Sunday School teachers, the genealogies help us to see God's gracious work taking place in the midst of real, genuine human history. They also help us to see that God's plan of salvation is, indeed, anchored in His plans and purposes from the very foundation of the world. They also set the stage for that great “begat” when, as we confess in the Nicene Creed that: *the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, Begotten, not made* has been begotten in human flesh and born of the Virgin Mary.

Even if you don't like reading those genealogies in the Bible, I want to tell you that they are important for you, too. They are part of your heritage. They are part of your family tree—at least, they are part of your *spiritual* family tree. You see, those ‘begats’ didn't stop once the pages of Holy Scripture were recorded. They continue, even today. God, in His grace and mercy continues to extend His family into all the world. He is still begetting children as He works through the Word and water of Baptism. This is why John is able to say: ***See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*** Since we are all children of God, and God is our Father, then we are also brothers and sisters, part of one big family—the family of the faithful; the family of God.

We are family. That is such a simple thing to say, and yet it has so much meaning for us! The whole concept of family brings a certain closeness and a special comfort that is not found anywhere else. It is true that family life in our world today is far from ideal, and sometimes the whole concept of family troubles and frightens people. A person who has been abused by a family member or who has been deserted by the family may not have a very positive feeling about what it means to be part of a family. But for the most part we experience some wonderful benefits and blessings through our families. Being part of a family brings companionship, as we work and live together, as we play and pray together. Our family can be our support group, giving us help and encouragement in the face of trouble or in the face of new challenges. In our family we can find acceptance and forgiveness when we have done something wrong or when we have failed in some way. Through our family relationships we experience what it means to love and to be loved. In our family we find comfort when we are faced with sadness and despair.

If you look all around you this morning, you will see members of your family. Since all people are descended from Adam and Eve, we are all of one family. In an even greater sense, we are family because we are the children of God. And just think how wonderful and miraculous that is! As Paul told the Ephesians: ***remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*** (Ephesians 2:12-13 - ESV) We are God's children, because God has brought us into His family. We weren't born that way, nor do we have the right to claim a place in His family. Our sinfulness has destroyed the father-child relationship we were meant to have with God. As sinners we are outside of God's family, orphans without hope or promise. But the Father's love for us is so great that He gave His own Son to bring us back into His family. Jesus set aside all His rights of Sonship in order to save us. He was even willing to be forsaken of His Father when He took all our sin and guilt upon Himself and paid the price for our sins when died for us on the cross. By dying for us and by rising again from the dead, Jesus has brought us forgiveness and the right of adoption as God's children. He has made it possible for you and me to call God our Father.

With God as our Father, we are all brothers and sisters. We are family, a family brought together through faith in Jesus Christ. We rejoice that God has called us together in Christ into this congregation and fellowship; that He has been at work in this, His family, to bless us. We also remember on this All Saints' Day that we are part of a greater and more glorious family. That family is not just the members of this congregation; nor is it comprised merely of those who are part of Lutheran Church-Canada. St. Paul assures us: ***for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*** (Galatians 3:26 - ESV) That is the extended family we have, made up of all those who believe in and confess Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. But even then, the family isn't finished. In his hymn, *Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing*, Charles Wesley says: *To God all glory, praise, and love Be now and ever giv'n By saints below and saints above, The Church in earth and heav'n.* (LSB 528, st. 7) That is our extended family; all those believers in Christ throughout the ages, from Adam and Eve to Martin Luther and the Reformers; those whom we call saints, like Peter, James and John; all those in the 'begats' who truly believed—and, yes, our dear, loved ones who have departed this life in the faith. This is our extended family, the family of faith; the family of life; the family of God.

Even today, God is extending His family. We gather together at His Word and His Word is at work to give new life and new birth to those who are still strangers and aliens. In the last 2 weeks we have celebrated a Baptism here at Foothills and rejoiced with the young people who confessed their faith in their vows of Confirmation. In Baptism God is at work to give new birth to a child He calls to Himself; that birth which Christ was talking about when He told Nicodemus: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*** (John 3:5 - ESV) One of the greatest privileges I have as a pastor is to serve as a midwife, if you will, in this gift of grace, as God gives life and salvation to this child, and to all who are baptized into Christ. Now, in this family, God says to His children: ***“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.*** (Isaiah 43:1 - ESV)

God also wants this family to extend to the very ends of the earth. We should never simply think, “At least I have this life as God's child”. No, we want to see this family continue to grow, as we share the hope and life that is ours in Christ with all people, wherever they may be.

***See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*** What wonderful, good news this is! In the family we call the church we can share our needs and our hurts with people who care about us, and find in them the support and help we need in the troubled times. Oh, we have to admit that, like any family, our church family has some moments which are better than others. Even in this family there are those times of strife and discord, of anger and stubbornness, of selfishness and self-centeredness which are caused by the fact that every member of this family is a sinner. At times we fail to be as forgiving, as understanding, and as compassionate as we should be. We say things that hurt others. We do what we want, without any concern for the feelings of the other family members. Sometimes it is hard to love all our brothers and sisters as we should. We show by our actions that even though we are the children of God, we aren't yet what we know we will be. That is why we keep coming back to the Saviour. In our sinful disregard of one another, we come and seek God's mercy and grace again in Christ. And how blessed we are to be His children! He bestows on us the forgiveness we have in our brother, Jesus Christ. Knowing the life we have in Him and the glory that still awaits us, we follow the example of our brother and Saviour. As John says in our text: ***And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.***

We are family. The full measure of that promise is yet to be revealed. The day will come when we will join, as our Epistle lesson said, in that ***great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*** (Revelation 7:9-10 - ESV) The day is

coming when the blessedness of which Jesus spoke in our Gospel reading will be ours forever. But even now, we rejoice that we are God's children, part of His extended and extending family; that family of the church, which knows: *Yet she on earth has union With God, the Three in One, And mystic sweet communion With those whose rest is won. O blessèd heav'nly chorus! Lord, save us by Your grace That we, like saints before us, May see You face to face.* (LSB 644, st. 5) Amen.