

“Watching the Picture Develop” 1 John 3:1-3
St Marks UMC, Charleston, WV ALL SAINTS SUNDAY (November 2,) 2014

¹ See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he^{is} revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. ³ And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

What we shall be has not yet been revealed, but

I thought about how I used to watch a Polaroid picture developing after it shot out of the camera, and would do so, in my hand, right in front of my eyes.

And although the Polaroid (now digital) camera is making a comeback – two of my granddaughters wanted (and got from their grandparents) one for their birthdays – I realize that most people here today under the age of 40 years don’t know what I’m talking about.

So think about seeing the computer downloading a picture – as it takes shape first in distorted blurry form, and then gradually gathers clarity, more pixels, and sharpness, eventually becoming such high definition, it is clearer than the real thing.

THIS is what I think of when I hear today’s scripture.

We are “BECOMING” and that’s open ended. God’s not done with any of us yet.

We have this hope ... how important is hope?

Ultimately we have to trust that God is good.

It’s also the developing picture that goes *beyond just our lives* – it includes, in the BIG picture: **BEFORE** and **AFTER** our lives.

Let me add just a bit more scripture – one that we are used to hearing on All Saints’ Sunday – from the 11th chapter of the New Testament book of Hebrews, where the author has reviewed many of the saints of the faith, beginning back with Abraham and going forward, remembering for his listener how they did many mighty things, on the basis of their faith in God’s Promise.

HOWEVER, the 11 chapter concludes with these words:

³⁹ Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

We complete what our forebears could not. They are depending on US for their final reward. They are cheering us on.

To help understand this, consider how I cannot create for myself the identity of “grandfather” – only my children can do this for me.

Those who have gone on before us cannot create themselves as predecessors of a church that will be here a generation from now. Only we can do that.

They are part of who we are. From Wendell Berry’s book Hannah Coulter:

"The membership includes the dead. Andy Catlett imagines it going back and back beyond the time when all the names are forgotten. The members, I guess you could say, are born into it, they stay in it by choosing to stay, and they die in it. Or they leave it, as my children have done.

"Now nearly all of the membership of 1950 are dead. The still living members are mainly Danny and Lyda Branch and their descendants, the Catletts, who are still here, and me, for the little use I am. ...

"And so an old woman, sitting by the fire, waiting for sleep, makes her reckoning, naming over the names of the dead and the living, which also are the names of her gratitude. What will be remembered, Andy Catlett, when we are gone? What will finally become of this lineage of people who have been members of one another? I don't know. And yet their names and their faces, what they did, are not gone, are not 'the past,' but still are present to me, and I give thanks."

Today, in this holy place, on this holy day, when – in the words of Bishop William Boyd Grove, as stated at the top of your bulletin in the orange colored box:

TODAY, ON THIS HIGH, HOLY DAY, THE VEIL BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD IS PULLED BACK, AND THAT WHICH SEPARATES US FROM THEM IS BUT A GOSSAMER WEB. HERE, TODAY, THIS IS A THIN PLACE. HERE, TODAY, THIS IS INDEED HOLY GROUND.

we are part of something that is bigger than just our own life unfolding. We are part of the Church Universal – and the Church triumphant, which the Book of Revelation (after all its sometimes confusing imagery) makes abundantly clear: God wins, and we are on God's team. It is and is yet to come. This HOPE is ours, and it's bigger than just us.

Can you feel that here in this moment? [Pause for that feeling to sink in.]

I am reminded of the Jewish prayer that I use often in my funeral liturgy, as part of the commendation:

We think now of those who stand here with us no more: family, friends, neighbors, the great and good of every race and nation – all who have been a blessing to us and to all humanity.

Their memory blesses us now and always; their life lives within us still.

Our beloved are with us through the blessing of memory and the power of their example. They help us to live as they themselves sought to live. We think of them now; they live in our hearts; they are a continual blessing.

Think of these who are just in this year's class (and others who are important in our individual lives who have gone on) – what they have given us ... how they are waiting even now for what we will give to them ... how the picture is still developing, coming clearer, giving us HOPE, because God is still in charge, because the Final Victory is still in process of unfolding.

It is GIFT to us, and we are GIVING as well – falling down, but getting back up; falling down, but getting back up – not perfect, but perfectly loved.

Thanks be to God for this gift, for these gifts, for the chance to give.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.