

## “This is Only the Beginning”

### 1John 3: 1-3

There are just some Scriptures that are timeless. Their message translates across time and context. For example, take Psalm 23. Even though for the most part, we the ones of us sitting in the pews nowadays, are not shepherds nor do our lives revolve around the shepherd business, we get the point and message behind Psalm 23. We get and understand that it is about God’s guidance, God’s comfort, God’s unwavering presence in our lives. We get Psalm 23’s message because that’s what we’ve experienced already in our own lives. The psalmist isn’t telling us anything new. He is just reminding of what we know already about our God, what we’ve already experienced about our God. We get Psalm 23. It needs no translation. It needs no explaining. It is timeless.

Just like our text today. I invite you to hear these words as we listen once again to another timeless text that comes from our Holy Scriptures.

(Read Text)

I know right? Timeless! God’s love comes through loud and clear. John could have easily been sitting at Midway School Bakery here and now, today, writing these words. Regardless of time period, regardless of context, some things

just don't change, like the knowledge that God loves us more than we could ever imagine, like the knowledge that we are claimed and named as God's very own children. Some things don't change like the fact that the world has never understood us as the Body of Christ and why we do the things we do, or why we say the things we say. The world just looks at us like we are crazy. And I'm going to let you in on a little secret. The world is always going to think we are crazy. That's the way it has always been and will always be. Not because we are odd or anything...okay well, maybe just a bit.

The world doesn't understand us because we live out this whole "here but not yet" mentality in our lives through our words and actions. The world doesn't understand us because we celebrate a crucified Savior. The world doesn't understand us because we proclaim that love will always win. Not money, not power, not might but love. We say love will always win. And the world doesn't get that because that is not how this world operates.

The world will never understand us as the Body of Christ. That's not going to change. It hasn't in two thousand or more years. And let's face it, we are okay with that face not changing because we know that this world does not have the last word. God does. We understand that this is only the beginning and the best is yet to come. We get that we are sort of like split personalities: celebrating the

Kingdom of God in our midst yet knowing that it is not fully realized. That's the way the children of God have been for over two thousand years and thankfully, that's how we are going to keep being the children of God here on earth.

So yeah, the world doesn't get us. That's okay because we know this is only the beginning. The best is yet to come. This world does not have the last word. God does. And this is only the beginning.

So we are okay with the fact that Some things just don't change like how the world perceives us because we know that there are more important things that don't change either like God's love for us, like God's transforming grace. These things are timeless. And regardless of context or location, their message comes through loud and clear.

That's the promise we have as the children of God. We can rely on it. It never changes. It is timeless. And it needs no explanation.

Which puts us preacher types in a tight spot. Where's the sermon if the text says it all? Where's the opportunity to go on and on about stuff if John is going to say it all in just a few lines. What's a preacher supposed to do?

Well, the answer is to not look at this text as a preacher but to accept the Spirit's invitation to look at it from the viewpoint and stance of a person of faith-

me, you, as the Body of Christ and definitely from the viewpoint of the cloud of witnesses who have already experienced what John meant when he shared that the best is yet to come, when he shared that this life is only the beginning.

So as I started to shift gears from being a preacher type and reclaiming my viewpoint as a person of faith, I couldn't help but wonder why John's first line is something that we always seem to forget as people of faith. We always seem to forget that God loves us more than we could ever imagine. We always seem to forget what a marvelous love it is. This life-giving fact easily gets lost in the crud of our day. There is just so much negatively going around. There is just so much hurt going around. It is so easy to forget that fact especially when the world seems like it is ganging up on us. In situations like that, the thought that God loves us more than we could ever imagine never comes to mind. We forget what a gift God's love is for us and to us. It is what gives us hope. It is what gives us strength. It is what give us endurance to keep going. And how quickly we forget it when it seems like our world is falling apart.

Sometimes, I think that phrase, "God loves us more than we could ever imagine, that phrase should be what wakes us up each morning. You know, like an alarm clock that speaks to us before our feet even hit the floor. It could say something like, "Good morning, Heather. God loves you more than you will ever

know. You are a child of God. That's who you really are: named and claimed as God's very own! That alarm clock would be fantastic until...well, the first time that I was grumpy, or didn't want to get out of bed, or well, it would be great until I smacked it across the room.

Because well, I guess after a while, that voice would be too much, you know, too chipper, too sweet, too nice, too perfect, too, well, everything. That's the danger of hearing that phrase over and over again. It becomes like saccharine, too sugary, and too false.

Yeah, I guess, I never thought of the danger in hearing God loves you too many times. It can lose its power. It can lose its umph. It can soon become a simple platitude, just words to say, to avoid dealing with the bigger issues. It can soon become obnoxious and won't help people grow in their faith anymore, which not a good thing. So we have to be careful how and when we say them and share them with our community.

John knew all this when he wrote these words but they were too important for him not share. He knew his community was hurting and needed to be reminded that God loved them. He knew that it was something they could always count on them especially in a world where they couldn't count on much. He is not sharing these words to give his community a boost to their self esteem. He is being sincere.

He is being real. He is sharing the life giving, the life-transforming Gospel as he had already experienced in his own life. He is sharing God's timeless promise with his community.

And it is the same promise that we still have today as Christians through our faith. It is this promise that we experience each and every time we remember and celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know that this is just the beginning, that the best is yet to come!

Hearing that never gets old. Living that out in our lives never grows boring or too sweet. We know that this is just the beginning, this bit of grace, this bit of hope, this amazing love that we are experiencing here on earth. All of that is just the beginning. The best is yet to come. We know that one day, we will see God face to face. We know that one day, we will be made whole. We know that one day, there will be no more tears, no more death, no more hurting. We know that one day, it will be all light and love. We have only experienced just a small part of this life giving, this life transforming promise. The best is yet to come! Because God has the last word.

What better message do we need right now. The best is yet to come. Everything is going to be okay. We don't know when or how but everything is going to be okay. We as people of faith have the promise that God loves us more

than we could ever imagine, that we are children of God, and that is just the beginning. One day, God will wipe away our tears. Death will be no more. All will be light and love. We will see our God face to face. The best is yet to come!

I know this seems too sweet, too saccharine, too unreal in light of all we have faced this past year as a community of faith. We have had a rough year, communally and individually. We have had a lot on our plates: surgeries, deaths, retirements, frustrations, worries about jobs, worries about money, and uncertainty. Some of us have lost loved ones and their names have been added to the list of saints who have gone on before us while others of us have lost loved ones in a different way. Our loved ones are here physically but mentally they have been lost to us for years. Some of us still grieve deeply our losses because the loss is still so new while others have had months, weeks, and years to ease the pain.

And it is just not the loss of loved ones that we have faced this year. There are other losses that we have experienced. We have watched our bodies age and break down and we have wondered when the warranty expired. We have mourned the loss of the perception that our parents will always be there to care for us, will always be strong, and will always be our caretakers. That is a rough spot to be in when we realize that the roles have reversed and the grief in this type of situation can be overwhelming at times.

And these are just to name a few. Among the other losses we may have experienced in our lives, we are also mourning and continue to mourn the loss of security. We recognize that we are entering into a brave new world, where the rules are different, where things that we counted on to be there forever are no longer proving to be timeless, and in this new reality, we are treading new, sometimes scary waters.

As a community of faith, we have had and continue to have a lot on our plates as a community and as individuals. And I know it seems a little too sweet, a little too false to be bringing to you that God loves us more than we could ever image, and that this is only a beginning. I know it seems a little insufficient to be saying, The Best is yet to come. But I'm going to tell you something, not as a preacher type, but as a person of faith. That's all I've got.

Because that's exactly what I have experienced in my own faith, experienced along my own faith journey. The bad never stays bad for long and somehow, someway, we make it out of the dark valley, and then we realize all the good stuff in our lives. We begin to understand that this world does not have the last word. God does. And that blessing is only just the beginning. We have and have always had the promise that one day, we will see our God face to face, that one day, death will be no more, that tears will be wiped away, and that all will be



light and love. WE have always had that promise and we will always have that promise. It is timeless and it never changes.

So yes, as a person of faith, no matter how simplistic it may sound, no matter how too sweet it may be, sometimes the best I've got is God loves us, and this is only the beginning. The best is yet to come. There is truly power in those words. There is uumph in those words.

They lets us know that we are not alone, that God is with us, holding us in the palm of God's hand. These words let us know we are surrounded by a community who loves us, who walks with us, who cries with us, who laughs with us, who hopes with us. And they let us know that the community doesn't just end with those gathered here in this place. We know that this promise of God's love is timeless and it has been a comfort and hope for people throughout the generations of the world. So when we hear that God loves us and that this is only the beginning, we can also hear the voices of the saints reassuring us that everything will be okay. That's what they have already experienced upon the completion of their own faith journeys. They are experiencing the Kingdom of God to the fullest. They are experiencing the love of God to the fullest. They are experiencing the grace of God to the fullest. They are experiencing the peace of God to the fullest. All the saints are saying to us, Just you wait! The best is yet to come!

As children of God, we may not know when or where or how this will all happen but we know that everything will be okay. We know this because that is what the children of God have experienced since the beginning of time. This small bit of grace, this small bit of love, this small bit of comfort is just the beginning. The best is yet to come.

That's the true timeless message of the Gospel. It will never change. God loves us more than we could ever imagine. We are named and claimed as God's very own children. And this grace, this hope, this love is just the beginning. The best is yet to come.

These are not too sugary words or simple platitudes to make us feel better about ourselves. These are the things we truly believe and hold as Truths. These are the words that give us strength for the journey ahead. That give us courage to continue in faith. That give us hope as people of faith. We hold to the promises of God, knowing that this is only the beginning. The best is yet to come.

We've already experienced a small portion of God's goodness and God's grace in our lives. We've already experienced a little bit of God's steadfast love in our lives. We've already experienced a small portion of God's faithfulness to God's promises in our lives. And we know that this is only the beginning. The best is yet to come.

So today, as we come, remembering and naming our losses over the past year, we know that God is with us, walking beside us, and holding us in the palm of God's hand. We know that this too will pass. We know that we are surrounded by friends, family, and a communion of saints who watch over us, love us, guide us, and share with us. We know that everything is going to be okay. We may not know when or how or where but we can hold onto the knowledge that the promise is real. We have been given a gift: the gift of hope that is grounded in God's steadfast love and tenderness. We have been given a gift: the knowledge that God loves us more than we could imagine. We have been given a gift: the promise that this world does not have the last word. God does.

This is only a beginning. The best is yet to come.

May we always remember this timeless message and believe in its unchanging, unwavering presence in our lives. Amen.