

"The Upgrade"

Text: 1 John 1:1-2:2

May you always recognize the love that your God has for you, and how he demonstrates that love in your life, moment by moment. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, the concept of "upgrading" is pure marketing genius. It offers plausible deniability that we are greedy or dissatisfied, or that we could possibly be spending too much money because we are not actually *spending* money, we are just *upgrading*. We didn't really *buy* a brand new car, we just upgraded. You can't travel without being bombarded with upgrade offers. Buy a plane ticket for a seat in the unwashed masses section of the aircraft, and immediately the pressure builds to upgrade to "stretch seating" (which offers 1 and 17/32" of additional leg room.) Or you can move up to business class (which looks suspiciously like stretch seating) and from there to First Class, which comes with the free fantasy that you really are someone important and really don't mind spending a couple hundred dollars more for a one hour flight. You can upgrade snacks now on an airplane – moving from the free micro-bag of 12 peanuts to the jumbo 20 peanut bag.

And it never ends. Car rentals start with the sub-compact micro mini (with room enough for no adults, two children, and an iPod). If you have more than that, start upgrading. It makes one stop to consider if there was anything in life that couldn't be "upgraded" – anything at all where your eye couldn't wander to something "better." Adam and Eve taught us that the answer is probably no. They had perfection, and the devil sold them what he described as an upgrade.

Life has a way of magnifying the needs of the present. You've probably heard a child pleading with a parent, *"If you just let me have (fill in the blank – a puppy, a bike, a llama, an M1-A1 Abrams tank) I will never ask for another thing as long as I live."* It can be just about anything that captures the imagination at that particular moment. The reality is that sort of thing, that sort of longing, never ends. There will always be something more, something better, something that just needs to be upgraded.

The great irony here is that you and I already have that one thing that cannot and need not be upgraded because *there is nothing better*. Amazingly enough, we have, right now, the best possible thing we could ever have or own, and it's ours forever – the love of God the Father and adoption as his children.

We hear more about this in our text for this morning, found in John's First Epistle, the third chapter:

ESV **1 John 3:1-7** ***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. ² 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. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. ⁴ ¶ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.***

This is God's Word. God himself has given these words to you, and herein offers you wisdom, strength, and comfort. You are therefore blessed each time you hear God's Word and treasure it. To that end we pray, ***"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Did you catch the "best thing" that we already have, the one thing in our lives that just can't be upgraded? Hear it again: ***"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."***

Don't miss the message of these divine words. Don't let them just "pass through" without hitting something solid. Make them a part of you – the *best* part of you. You are, according to the divinely inspired words of our text, a child of God. Our text goes on: ***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.***

There are actually two different truths that we are here taught. The first is that we have been adopted by God. The second, which in no way changes the first, is that we have not yet reached our full potential. As good as we have it now, it will get even better.

Although some use the two words interchangeably, there can be a significant difference between "upgrade" and "better." The difference

usually relates to scope, or what exactly is being upgraded. The larger the scope, the greater the likelihood that “upgrade” means “replace.” If you are upgrading your lawn equipment, it might mean that you are buying a new mower or trimmer. If you are upgrading just your mower, it could either mean that you are replacing it or making the mower you already own better. Upgrading your “fleet” probably means that you are replacing one of your vehicles. Upgrading your car could mean adding a spoiler and one of those rattle the windows sound systems.

When it comes to our status as children of God, “upgrade” can only refer to “better,” never different. In other words, what we have already been given (our identity as “children of God”) will never change. That is our identity now and it will remain our identity for all eternity. Through faith alone in Jesus Christ, what we are now we will always be. Changing conditions in our world cannot change our status. Death cannot change our status. The ridicule or denial of the godless cannot change our status. What we are at this very moment, by God’s grace, will never change.

Take a moment to see if you can identify anything else in your current existence that can never change. What you own can be lost. What you know can be forgotten. What you feel can change. Are you a husband or wife now? That will end when God calls you or your spouse home. Your title at work is lost when you retire or are terminated. No matter how physically strong you are now, age will rob you of that strength. You are left then with only “were,” “used to be.”

Not so with your status as a child of God. Though you have the terrible ability to throw that away, nothing and no one can *take* it from you. You also have God’s promise that when you remain continually in his Word, you will remain forever his child because he himself will provide his protection and preservation. You will remain forever a child of God.

Only when the full import of that truth sinks in and becomes an inseparable part of you are you ready to move on – and move on you must. The fact that you are a child of God *means* something, not just to you but to everyone with whom you come in contact. Because of what God has made us, we need to, we *want to*, upgrade, not in the sense of different but improved. According to that new man in us, we want to be ever and always better.

There is just something uplifting, comforting, encouraging about that word “better” isn’t there. Life’s problems don’t typically get fixed all at once. The solution is most often a trend or process. “Better” says that the process is headed in the right direction.

Since you and I are children of God, we are part of a family. Part of our responsibility as members of a family is to help each other when the trend is headed in the wrong direction – when something is getting worse instead of better – when we are in fact *downgrading*. The national trend we currently see all around us in nearly every aspect of our society is a slouch toward mediocrity. Call it “*an aspiration toward average*” – which is pretty much the exact opposite of “better.” It should surprise no one that this mindset is finding its way also into our churches and into our personal walk with our Lord. It seems to have started gradually, like fungus growing in dark places. Somehow it just gradually became a part of our culture. This “*aspiration toward average*” is the tendency to be mediocre, or just a little bit *below* average. In society we see the trend in the lack of any sort of depth in what comes out of Hollywood, in the grades our children are comfortable with in school (or the academic standard to which they are held). We see it in the way many employees carry out their work, and in the products companies produce.

Christians are obviously not immune. In fact Christian churches seem to have an ever increasing number of members who desire to be average or below average attenders, average or below average contributors, average or below average Bible readers, average or below average witnesses and church workers. It’s up to each individual Christian to honestly evaluate if the problem is “out there” or here within us. Am I content with dedicating only a below average portion of my life to God and his work? Would I, in fact, be happier if everyone would downgrade a bit so that I, in turn, could downgrade – and still be average. Am I part of the problem?

One contributing factor is that society has lowered its expectations. When you lower your expectations, you usually get even less. So too parents expect from their children only as much as they expect from themselves. The result, again, is that they usually get less, and the trend toward mediocrity has begun. Children pick up on this message as clearly as if it were tattooed on mom and dad’s foreheads. The message is that mom and dad will expect no more in conduct, propriety, and performance than they themselves produced. We say we want more for our children, and then subconsciously urge them toward less. What we then produce is a generation that goes to church less than we did, volunteers less, contributes less, pulls less than its own weight, and centers its existence slightly less around the Word of God. Satan loves the gradual deterioration. He urges parents into the trap with guilt. “*How can you demand from your child what you did not*

do?" "How can you punish your child for what you got away with?" "How can you require what you were not willing to give?"

Christianity is about the flawless, non-upgradable perfection of Jesus Christ. The new man in us longs to reflect that perfection with excellence in every aspect of our lives. It's not uncommon for non-Christians to accuse us of believing that we are better than everyone else. Hard to know how to respond to that. Maybe it's as simple as, "No, not at all. But we try to be." Our text gives us a sense of this when it says, "**And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.**" In Chapter 1 of this Epistle John says, "**This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.**" How beautifully John here phrases the distinction between good and evil - between the child of God and the child of Satan. God is light. Those who want to walk as children of God walk in the light. Darkness and light are absolutely incompatible. They cannot coexist. If something is dark, it is not light. If something is light, it is not dark. We are children of *light*. As such it is to be expected that we want to have absolutely nothing to do with darkness.

John saw the terrible consequences of sin with his own eyes. John was an eyewitness of Jesus Christ being crucified for sin - *our* sin, *all* sin. There is therefore no such thing as an unimportant sin or an acceptable downgrade. A terrible price had to be paid. That means that there can be no place in the Christian heart for anything less than a loathing of all that is evil and a continual striving for excellence.

The perfect payment made by Jesus Christ cannot be upgraded, cannot be improved upon or added to. Our response is not about adding our works to Christ's, it is about thanking him by loathing the sin from which we have been cleansed and battling against temptation every moment of every day we walk this earth. That now is the standard to which we aspire – never to try to save ourselves by our works but to be exactly like the One who *did* take away our sins by his works. As Christians, the new man that we put on day by day yearns within us to walk always and only in the light. That new creation within each Christian also therefore longs to drive out all spiritual mediocrity, weakness, and laziness and to labor with joy and vigor in holy service to our Savior God. We want to upgrade, to do better.

Learn to recognize in yourself the temptation toward Christian mediocrity, and to acknowledge, day by day, the tremendous evil and the eternal danger of all sin. Then look to the perfect love of our Savior - a love that moved him to sacrifice himself to wash us clean in the sight of our

Heavenly Father – and be comforted. Our God has adopted us as his children. He has thereby called us out of the darkness of sin and death and into the light of his love. Walk in that light, and in the excellence of service that is indeed fitting for children of our Creator God. Amen.

ESV **Acts 3:11-21** While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. ¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And his name-by faith in his name-has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. ¹⁷ ¶ "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

ESV **Luke 24:36-49** As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them. ⁴⁴ ¶ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

ESV **1 John 3:1-7** 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. ² 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. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. ⁴ ¶ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.



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Father has given to us:
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For this reason the world does not
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The Second Sunday after Easter – April 14, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 4 (Red Hymnal)

"God Himself Is Present"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Epistle Lesson: (Acts 3:11-21) When Jesus' work on earth came to an end, the work of his disciples had just begun. While Jesus certainly paid the full penalty for sin, it was left to his followers to share this message with the world. That calling, that Great Commission, is still in force today. Listen carefully then to the words of Peter in our first lesson, for you would be hard pressed to find a better example of how to tell others about their Savior.

Psalms 85 (Supplement page 40) (Brown Hymnal)

The Gospel Lesson: (Luke 24:36-49) It is understandable that the disciples were not only *saddened* by Jesus' death, but were also greatly *confused* by that same event – and then again by his resurrection from the dead. Jesus was gracious enough, following his resurrection, to take the time to explain to them why things had to be as they had been. This is precious information indeed. We too would be wise to listen carefully this morning to these words from our Savior.

The Confession of Faith -

Nicene Creed – (Supplement page 5)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 206 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense"

The Sermon – 1 John 3:1-7 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Upgrade"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 799 (Brown Hymnal)

"This Is the Feast of Victory for Our God"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 49 (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty God, Thy Word is Cast"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (43) Average (42) Wednesday (22)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Pierre
Wednesday	- No Midweek Classes	
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Teacher Katie Naumann is considering the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac. Through the CLC Call Committee on Graduates, seminary graduate Paul Agenten has received the calls to St Peter's of Iron River and Calvary of Marquette.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend a study conference in Pierre tomorrow and to visit family Tuesday-Saturday. Note that there are no midweek classes scheduled for the coming week. Our regular midweek schedule resumes April 24th.

After Banquet Party – The Women's Fellowship will again be collecting donations for the After Banquet Party at ILC. This is a worthy cause that provides the students at ILC with an enjoyable and wholesome way to spend their time after the Spring Banquet. Donations can be given to Carolyn Johnson or Angela Pfennig. Please see Cindy Ollenburger for more information.