

Sermon for 5.11.17

Today we celebrate the feast of All Saints. Today we recall our brothers and sisters, the saints of every age in the Christian tradition and praise God for their examples.

We also commemorate the holy ones known only unto God and those of the less distant past, our own loved ones.

You'll notice that we have different banners hanging here today. Since they hung here last in 2014 – 3 years ago – our parish family has journeyed through the loss of further beloved family members – hence today they hang before us again and the blank faces invite us to imagine the image of a loved one or the image of our favourite saint. Our thanks to Di Edwards for donating them to us for our use in today's services.

In our church of St Matthews we have in the lead light windows the images of the saints and these provide a glimpse of the great crowd of witnesses who surround us.

Over the past weeks the gospel readings have called us to reflect upon the reality of a faith that believes the messiah, the Christ, came as one of us in humanity and is also one with God in divinity.

When we recall the communion of saints we affirm in faith our belief in the salvation of Christ, and our conviction that the church is not merely an earthly realm, but part of the larger reality.

Through the communion of saints we witness the connectedness between heaven and earth and in the epistle this morning from John's first letter, this connectedness is in the power and mystery of love "beloved we are God's children now, what we will be has not yet been revealed."

Now when we suffer the loss of a loved one, accepting the mystery can be very hard for us.

We may, however, find comfort in our faith as God's children, knowing that we live in God's tender love in both life and death, on earth and in heaven.

It is this love that will "wipe away every tear from our eyes" as prophesied in Revelation.

During the service today we will be invited to light a candle for our loved ones as our love for them continues to shine in our hearts.

In the gospel reading today from Matthew we hear the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in the proclamation of the 8 beatitudes. Much is written about the beatitudes and there are many interpretations available to help to satisfy the curiosity of our minds yet for me they simply speak to the heart in a beauty that shines forth like lamps in the darkness. The beatitudes light the way to the narrow door that Jesus beckons us to enter through. They guide us along the path of life in love with God and with each other and with ourselves. They speak about the attitude to life that is Christ-like; that we are not only to have but are to be.

The beatitudes, call us into relationship with God, ourselves and each other.

In that relationship we are to trust in God with our heart. We are to allow ourselves to be comforted by God; to be humbled; to hunger and thirst for God; to be merciful and compassionate to one another; to be aware of our true self, which is God in us; to be discerning, unafraid and peaceable as is God's way;, and to have a consciousness that focuses on God first and from which all else in our lives flows.

It is not hard to see that this way of life is foreign to the way of the world, which, for most of us, is why we deviate from the path so readily. Yet the lamps on the path are never dimmed, they never go out, they are always there, giving light and life. God's understanding and forgiveness continually allows us to return to the path and walk on in him, for God's love, made manifest in Christ, is always ready and able to conquer all our failures and frailties.

In this age in the modern world such a way of surrender and openness to God that the Beatitudes proclaim, may well be construed as a *cop out* or even a *weakness* in character, yet the call is to be Christ-like and as such the call remains our strength and assured hope in every age.

In the communion of Saints we see that it is possible to follow the way of Christ and live in the world but not belong to it.

Today we give thanks to God for all the saints, the holy ones of long ago and those of our recent past. Those we have not known personally and those we have known in our lives and loved in our hearts.

The Lord be with you.