

Sermon for 4.11.19 All Saints Day Rev'd Jenny Simson

Today we celebrate All Saints day and for our parish church All Saints, it is our patronal festival for all the saints are our patrons. We are surrounded by them – by a great cloud of witnesses.

In our church of St Matthews, images in the stained glass windows constantly remind us of our saintly heritage and as well as their witness to the way of Christ they speak also about God's abundant love for us all.

So what makes a saint a saint, what does it mean to be a Christian saint?

Well we begin in the Old Testament, where we find that the word translated "saint" is the Hebrew *qadowsh* which means sacred, Holy One, set apart. It does not only refer to people though, but also describes a place, food and God.

The word "saint" in the New Testament is the Greek *agios*. In scripture we can find it also translated to refer to people, who are Christlike, the Holy Spirit, Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies in the Temple, prophets, and general believers.

Different Christian denominations have varied ways of defining what makes a saint a saint.

For example the Roman Catholic tradition believes a saint to be anyone who has lived holy lives in obedience to God's will and is now in heaven for eternity. The church has enacted a policy that identifies these qualifications at which time canonisation can take place.

The Anglican tradition tends to share in the veneration of the saints canonised by the Catholic Church. Eastern Orthodox believe that any believer who is in Heaven is a saint, whether those on earth know it or not; for the Orthodox, the title has little to do with behaviour or piety. This is more in line with the New Testament which defines the Christian "saint" as anyone who follows Jesus.

The New Testament testifies that every Christian is set apart from the world, to do good works through Jesus. The term "saint" is a reflection of the changes God makes in us, not our success in embodying those changes.

So, given these understandings, here we are all together, the saints living and departed, those canonised, those who are simply held in our hearts and those whom we don't know. All of us belong to the one family, one large reality that takes in the realms of heaven and earth and who all belong to the "communion of saints."

Now in the reading from Ephesians this morning, we hear the empowerment of the saints – in that it is through our belief our faith in Christ that we are marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. In the epistle Paul takes us a little deeper into what that means when he prays for us to be empowered with the eyes of our hearts, seeing beyond the superficial, into the hope that is filled with riches and greatness according to the working of God's great power in Christ. It is the saints who point us to the reality that this belongs to us for they were and are, through the power of the Holy Spirit able to surrender to the way of God witnessed in the way they lived. Their lifestyle actions hold out to us the Christian

project which is: to come to want what God wants. Their person hood herald's divine freedom – free to act openly, free to be in the mystery of God displaying beauty in infinite variety.

Now we may not yet be present to this saintly way of 'freedom' in God- I know I'm not there yet – however, I believe it is helpful to hold in our hearts that what the saints had in them, shows us what is real in us, albeit perhaps still in infancy or hidden under old habits.

I believe that is what the saints do for us, they draw back the curtains and disclose the whole journey that we are on **as real**. It is this that can give us hope and impetus to continue on the journey to live in communion with God.

In the gospel today we hear Luke's version of the beatitudes delivered on the plain. We may be more familiar with Matthews's version of the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, however Luke's sermon has many parallels, but is much shorter.

Luke's setting takes place when Jesus has just chosen his twelve disciples who were to be the nucleus, the centre and starting-point, for what God was now going to do. They were to be the core of God's renewed Israel.

In the sermon there are four promises and four warnings in similar form to Israel's scriptural codes; as in the book of Deuteronomy, there are long list of blessings for those who obeyed the law, and curses for those who didn't.

These formed part of the covenant, the binding agreement between God and Israel. Now, with the renewed Israel formed around him, Jesus goes deeper into the way of the heart of God's kingdom on earth.

For all the people who had been passed over for a long time it means good news. The poor, the hungry, those who weep and those who are hated – blessings are poured upon them. And for those who were rich, filled, laughing and liked woe is to be their lot.

Now In this day and age when we are very conscious of dualism - that is, keeping things separated by difference, as opposed to bringing things together in unity, we may see this sermon as a very dualistic approach - on the one hand there are the blessings and on the other the woes with no view to a united front in sight. Yet the reality of Luke's sermon is that at its heart is the need for love.

The poor, hungry, sad and hated, in their blessed state are to see others - even the rich, the filled, the laughing, and the liked, through the eyes of love. We are not view each other with aggression or hatred. In Jesus words "But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also."

With these words we hear that Love is what holds all of this together. It is the glue of unity in God's kingdom on earth. It is to be our activity, our reality as Christ's disciples because it is the only power that can break through in to the world and change things for the better for everyone. It is the only tool that will enable God's equity in this world.

Down through the ages we have witnessed this sacred power through the way of the saints who have reached out universally in love - even to those beyond their own faith – ones like St Francis who reached out to the natural world and to our Muslim brothers and sisters, in love and acceptance.

St Terese of Avila who took in and cared for all peoples in her convents particularly the desperate, and a more recent Saint Mary Mackillop who welcomed all students especially the needy and under privileged into her fold, regardless of faith belief.

Today we give thanks to God for all of them, 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.

Let us pray

Dear lord

we pray that like all the saints

we may be loyal to our faith in Christ.

May our lives bear witness to the faith we profess,

and our love bring others

to the peace and joy of your gospel.

In Jesus name we pray Amen.

The Lord be with you.