

All Saints' Day: 1st November 2020

Order of Service

Welcome

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

You are warmly welcome to join us in worship today Sunday 1st November. I am Mark Poole, the curate of our benefice of four parishes to the east of York and it is our joy to bring this service to you today.

This is All Saints' Sunday, and you will be hearing from my colleagues in song and word as we reflect on this.

I recently read that All Saints is an opportunity to be reminded of our connectedness to one another through our faith in God. In these times, where we have been and continue to be in various stages of lockdown, this reminder could not be more poignant.

I was inspired this week to hear of how one of our families has lived out this spirit of being connected. They returned to a church they visited once whilst on holiday in Northumbria where they had been made most welcome. Of course, the small church was closed but the family pinned a message to the door, giving thanks for their previous welcome and an assurance of their prayers. I am sure this was a real blessing and a gift of encouragement to them.

Paul, who wrote to many churches, encouraged and blessed them and I was reminded of 1 Corinthians 1:9: 'God is faithful, by whom **you** were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.'

May we be encouraged of this fellowship we will always have with God and with one another this All Saints' Day, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Hymn

For all the saints, who from their labours rest;
who thee by faith before the world confessed
thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blessed:
Alleluia, alleluia!

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
steals on the ear the distant triumph-song;
and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.

Alleluia, alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west:
soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest,
sweet is the calm of paradise the blessed.
Alleluia, alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host
singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:
Alleluia, alleluia!

Prayers of preparation

With words from today's readings: 1 John 3:1-3, Revelation 7:9-17, Psalm 34:1-10

Since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses,
let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,
looking to Jesus in penitence and faith.

Lord, you are gracious and compassionate:
Lord, have mercy.

You are loving to all
and your mercy is over all your creation:
Christ, have mercy.

Your faithful servants bless your name
and speak of the glory of your kingdom:
Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon us,
pardon and deliver us from all our sins,
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness,
and keep us in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying,

'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?'

I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.'
Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal;
they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

For this reason they are before the throne of God,
and worship him day and night within his temple,

and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

Father, bless us in our time together of worship and thanksgiving.
Some of us are lonely and sad, grant us comfort.
Some of us are worried, grant us peace.
Some of us are in pain, grant us healing.

As we look to those who walked this path before us,
those women and men, those communities of the faithful,
may we find in them strength and bright hope,
encouragement and inspiration.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them.
O taste and see that the Lord is gracious; blessed is the one who trusts in him.

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them,
nor any scorching heat;

for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

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.

God of all holiness,
your glory is proclaimed in every age:
as we rejoice in the faith of your saints,
inspire us to follow their example
with boldness and joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Homily

One of the great traditions of the Anglican Church is the lectionary – if that's an unfamiliar term to you, it's effectively the church's calendar for the year. It gives every Sunday a name, and provides bible passages to read for each service. But as well as Sundays, it makes provision for readings for Morning and Evening Prayer every day of the year. But, as well as that, it lays down set dates throughout the year that are given over to remembering and celebrating particular people who have left a significant mark in the story of the Christian faith over the years.

There are 154 of those days altogether, so you don't have to wait long for one to come along. Most times there is one name to focus on, sometimes two, and just occasionally you get a bumper bonus day, with three.

This last week for instance, we had St Simon & St Jude (Apostles) on Monday, James Hannington, Bishop & Martyr on Tuesday and Martin Luther, Reformer, on Friday.

I love it! I love being reminded of the stories, which inspire us and remind us of the different contributions these people have made and what we can learn from them. I've always liked these stories.

I remember, when I was a lad at school (not long ago), there was always that series of 'Heroes of the Faith' thin books in the library. I'm sure I read them all.

These people were strong-minded and determined, often in the face of opposition. These were stories about saints who founded monastic orders that changed the global church; who confronted pagan kings; performed miracles feeding entire cities; smuggled thousands of Bibles into underground churches; and converted dozens of prisoners in concentration camps.

Some were tortured for their faith... even dying gruesome deaths... bravely proclaiming Christ to the last. These stories captured me. Christianity certainly wasn't dull looking through their eyes.

And today, the Church gives us a day to celebrate them all! Wow!

But, I must admit to having a couple of issues! You see, I'm not sure that God calls us to be heroes. Jesus didn't rise to the temptation of throwing himself off from the

roof of the temple in the wilderness – he could have done, but he refused to be a stunt man. God calls us to be ourselves. He might call some to heroic courses of action, but the traditional idea of a hero is someone who can do exceptional things and get the praise they deserve for it. Whereas, a saint is simply someone who the light of Christ has shone through in a particular way...and we can all qualify for that! Another issue I have is that the gospel reading for today, Matthew 5:1-12, the Beatitudes (as they are called) is not territory for super-heroes. In this reading, the blessings of God don't go to the super-strong daring people, they go to the poor and meek, those who mourn, those who are merciful, the peacemakers, the pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

In fact, the reading sort of implies that if you are comfortable, well-respected, emotionally sustained and reputationally secure, you could have more to be concerned about. Obviously, this passage needs more attention than we can give it today!

But there is a simple truth here worth highlighting - the times when we barely notice God are often the times when we have everything we need. And the times when we feel closer to God can be when we're at the end of our tether and don't know which way to turn!

My third issue is about lone rangers. Two weeks ago, we were thinking about Jesus sending out the 70 ahead of him to the towns and villages he was due to visit. There was a fundamental principle at the heart of that account – Jesus didn't send them alone. He sent them in pairs.

The message that came through there was you can't spread Good News on your own. We're called to proclaim the gospel together in community. What we do together bears a stronger message.

The heroes of the faith in those books years ago were all independent and self-assured. In contrast, of the 64 references to saints in the New Testament, every single one is in the plural. Saints are never alone – this sort of book brings out in the detail. Heroes have learnt to depend on themselves: saints learn to depend on the community of faith.

But All Saints' day is not just remembering all the saints – big ones, little ones, church ones or personal ones – for we all have people who we call, or have called true saints – and thank God for that; but it offers much more, because today, we celebrate being a part of and connected to the vast company of saints in heaven to help and inspire us.

We are fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God – some here on earth, some with God in heaven – but we are all one!

If those in heaven made a difference in life, through God's generous gifts at work in them, they will continue to make a difference gathered around God's throne. I like to think of them cheering us on every time we try to glorify God.

You know, in your quiet moments of prayer....you just might be able to hear them singing God's praises.

Intercessions

Lord, we stand before you, called to be saints and aware of the inadequacies in our own strength. Many saints today and over the centuries have witnessed to your glory. Give each of us confidence to rely on your overwhelming power; on your unbroken promises, and a determination to try to obey your calling.

Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Give us, here and throughout your creation, strength to be your church family in these unnerving times. May the Holy Spirit provide your folk with power to follow where the apostles led. Give ministers grace faithfully to preach your gospel.

Bless all who prepare, present and contribute to worship here in our benefice.

Encourage Nick, our rector, and Mark, our curate, as they give the pastoral lead that lay members most need.

Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Have mercy on a world where many feel despair and are in fear of what is to come. Lend wisdom and judgement to all elected leaders; to those who are entitled to vote, and to those who grant that right. Enable us to see need and address it in this country, where our parliament *votes* on whether to feed hungry children. May we and our leaders manage the distribution of aid fairly and generously.

This All Saints' Day, guide officials with responsibility for health care, control of infectious disease, and provision of economic opportunity. May they avoid narrow self-interest.

God of love, allow this generation to demonstrate the spirit that inspired the saints.

Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Teach us to see the holiness in other people. May we live as Jesus taught us.

The gospel of love demands that we care for our neighbours and our neighbourhoods. Help us to meet that call and to put others before ourselves. Give to every household in our villages, the love of your word.

Motivate your people to act in their communities to the benefit of all.

Lord, in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Bring assurance, comfort and healing to those who are sick, and your blessing to their carers. Bring relief where there is distress, and assurance to those whose faith is strong. Give the faithful departed a share in the inheritance of the saints and bring us, at last, to the same divine favour.

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, we ask you to sanctify these, our prayers.
Merciful father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Hymn

*For behold, we are surrounded by witnesses,
a cloud of prophets, martyrs, and servants of the Lord.
Those whose faith, by grace, was reckoned as righteousness,
with robes washed white have entered their reward.*

Earthly wealth they held at nought,
save what your blood had bought,
in mercy were clothed,
humility chose,
and followed the path of their Lord.

Within prison walls restrained,
for Jesus' sake enchained.
Still faithful, still true,
by prayer were renewed,
your justice and peace to proclaim.

Those who lived by your command,
to give with open hands,
are now sanctified

through your sacrifice,
accepted and blessed by the Lamb.

To your saints who dwell below,
their lives your love still shows.
Their stories are told
as lights for our road
to guide us as we journey home.

*For behold, we are surrounded by witnesses,
a cloud of prophets, martyrs, and servants of the Lord.
Every nation, tongue: a glorious multitude,
we join their praise to you with one accord.*

Blessing

We hope this service has been a source of blessing and encouragement to you.
Thank you for joining us. And thank you to all those who have contributed to it and
made it available to many.

May God,
who kindled the fire of his love in the hearts of the saints,
pour upon you the riches of his grace.
May he give you joy in their fellowship
and a share in their praises.
May he strengthen you to follow them in the way of holiness
and to come to the full radiance of glory.
And the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all.
Amen.