

Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

All Saints Day A

Sunday 1st November 2020

Blessed are those who've come through the great Ordeal

What reassuring and encouraging words we've heard today. The vision from Revelation surprises us with its comforting words.

Here are the countless multitudes before God's throne caught up in worship.

With John we are captivated by the beauty and mystery of this heavenly scene and the white robed ones who've come through the great ordeal.

We are emerging from the great ordeal of lockdown, blinking in the light of restored freedoms.

It has been a hard time and will continue to be for so many. We do not quite know what the future will look like.

Revelation gives us a glimpse of our ultimate reality.

It is a book that many of us do not understand and often find a bit scary, with its apocalyptic language.

Yet it was written to reassure those who were enduring hardship and to give them hope.

It was addressed to Christians facing oppression and persecution using language that they would have understood.

In this scene eyes are lifted heavenward.

We are drawn to this mysterious vision of heaven amongst the multitudes with the praise of God on their lips.

This is a scene where the reign of God welcomes all people from all nations.

Those who have endured are before God, where they are protected and where they hunger or thirst no more.

The Shepherd himself guides them to the water of life.

Here is the Lamb who has brought the multitudes home through his death and resurrection.

The picture of God wiping away tears is itself an intimate comforting gesture.

In worship and in hearing these readings we are reminded that reality is more than we can see and that we are part of a huge community of the living and the departed.

The communion of saints are those who are alive in God, who we no longer see.

On All Saints' Day we remember all those who have gone before us who have walked in the way of love.

We remember all those who in large and small ways have shown love, who have stood up for truth and have endured, who have been kind.

We are joined with them and walk in their footsteps and stand on their shoulders.

The word 'saint' means holy one. All of us as those who belong to God are holy ones – all of us are Saints.

All Saints Day reminds us that the Christian life is not just for the heroes and special people, but all of us.

There are countless multitudes who give us the courage to believe that the Christian life is possible and that our lives can shine with the glory of God's love.

They remind us to focus on what is most important – to practise love and to believe that transformation is possible.

Worship itself lifts our hearts to believe that the reality of God's blessings is now here and will continue to unfold into God's future.

This is what Jesus is talking about when he says blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God, blessed are those, for they will. Unlikely times and unlikely people are caught up into God's blessings.

As Frederick Buechner has said: *'On All Saints' Day, it is not just the saints of the church that we should remember in our prayers, but all the foolish ones and wise ones, the shy ones and overbearing ones, the broken ones and whole ones, the despots and tosspots and crackpots of our lives who, one way or another, have been our particular fathers and mothers and saints, and whom we loved without knowing we loved them and by whom we were helped to whatever little we may*

have, or ever hope to have, of some kind of seedy sainthood of our own.

In this time when we worship in our own homes we are invisibly joined to one another and are renewed in God's love and are given strength to go on and walk into God's future.

We can have courage and joy for the way ahead, that God will guide us as God is good.

God's blessings are abundant and continue, the blessing to live life to the full.

We are given hope that the hard things of life, suffering and grief are not the end of the story.

Many people before us, many unlikely people have already shown us that this is possible.

As we emerge from this lockdown we can reflect on who we are called to be as a church.

As we recall those who have died and are now held in God's love, may we have courage that we too can live into the blessings that God gives us.

May we trust in God and God's blessings that will bring us through the challenges of this time.

Lectio:
Revelation 7.9-17
Psalm 34.1-10,22
Matthew 5.1-12