

*Sermon Preached by Revd Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

*Feast of All Saints and All Souls*

*Sunday 3 November 2019*

*Saints – holy ones knit together*

Today we remember those who have gone before us.

I wonder how you remember those who have gone before you?

This question has been raised for me a couple of times this week.

Someone talked with me this week very movingly of their loved one and how they are held in their heart.

The person spoke of how they hear their voice in their mind and their presence in their hearts. They spoke about how they wanted to live in a way that did honour to them in gratitude for the relationship they'd had.

I have also read the book by Gail Jones *Death of Noah Glass* where the two adult children grieve and seek to find a way ahead and through it begin to remember again how their father had influenced them and shared stories of particular experiences including sharing their father's love of art.

This spoke to me about how the dead still live on in us and through us. All of these things speak of the communion of saints and how the line between the living and departed is not always as clear cut as what we think.

We are knit together with those who've gone before us.

All Saints' Day reminds us that the connection between heaven and earth. All Saints and All Souls' Day reminds us of all those who have been living signs of God's presence to us and are now in the greater presence of God.

Who have been signs of love to you?

We often think of Saints as those who are holier than thou, feet at least 6 feet off the ground who don't seem to be in touch with reality or have experienced real life but something else.

Dorothy Day (great campaigner for the poor in USA) alluded to this when she said 'Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed that easily'

All Saints Day speaks about real people, living real lives.

It speaks of all those real people who have lived out their lives in the circumstances they have found themselves in and have been loving and have shown something to us about what real human life can look like, that God's presence has shone through them.

It is a reminder that all humans are made in God's image and can show others God's love and hope.

The word 'saint' means 'holy one'.

All of us are called to be God's holy ones.

We are all set apart and marked as God's own at our baptism, stamped with the sign of the cross, marked as those loved by God.

All of us here are God's living saints at St Paul's. As someone reminded me this week a former priest here said – you lot in the pews are God's saints.

We each are holy ones of God and each day we encounter others who are God's walking and talking, living and breathing saints all around the place.

The first thing that Jesus does after calling his followers is to sit them down surrounded by the crowd wanting to be healed and teach them what it means to follow him.

And the first words he says are these blessings and woes.

They speak to what happens now is not all there is and that those who endure much find blessing in god's future. The whole reading talks about the kind of life that is expected of the faithful and it isn't always easy or comfortable but often means being vulnerable.

It is often a challenging reading to hear with its themes of blessing sand woes.

And wait there's still more!

I say to you that listen Jesus goes on to say. I say to the listening ones love your enemies, do good, bless those who curse, pray for those who abuse you. Give, do to others as you would have them do to you.

None of these are easy to live, but give us something to aspire to in following Jesus' example as God's holy ones.

I f we listen to God's call on our lives and respond to God's love and mercy we will live in certain ways.

Saints are those who listen to God's voice within them and respond.

Saints are those who notice what is going on in the community around them and seek to respond to the urgings of God's voice within them to show love and mercy.

Think of the father whose response to the conviction of his daughter's murderer could say that he did not seek vengeance but the safety and peace for other women walking home.

I say to you that listen.

The list of requirements looks impossible, any one of them is challenging yet Jesus is our model and shows us the way to follow and forgives us and gives us grace when we fail.

No saint throughout the ages has ever been perfect, in fact most seem to have more flaws than others.

Yet something in them shines of God's love. No saint has ever found it easy, indeed many of them have faced hardship and opposition.

Yet we continue with Paul to be reminded of the hope to which God has called us, an inheritance with all God's saints.

As the prayer for today says: you have knit together your chosen ones. It is those who have gone before us who show us the way, who have responded to the situation of their time with love, doing good, blessing and praying.

I wonder who these have been for you. I think of my grandmother, a gracious loving woman who showed me

what it meant to love and care quietly and gracefully, my mother who showed me the courage to find your place to express your gifts.

Today we remember each of those special to us and thank God for them and what they were able to do and how we might live out of the good of their example.

Gregory of Nyssa had a vision of the world's people in harmony – not just heard but actively dancing harmony.

A church in San Francisco named after Gregory of Nyssa painted this vision in their church – of various significant people, young and old, rich and poor, many different coloured to remind them of the remarkable diverse mixture of people that God chooses to work through, from Hildegard of Bingen to Oscar Romero, Elizabeth I to Ghandi.

These visual reminders remind us of the call to be holy, to join in the dance of love. Each of us have this capacity to nurture others and to see ourselves and our world differently.

As MR Ritley says: ‘

*We all walk hand in hand with saints for most of our lives and they aren't always the most obvious people. Each saint reveals God's actions in the world.’*

I wonder how you are called to reveal God's actions in the world, to see as God sees and to remind others that they matter, as God loves each of us.

Each of us have the grace to be saints to each other.

God blesses each of us in many ways to be living signs of love.

To be those who listen is to notice those blessings and in noticing those blessings our lives and the lives of others are transformed.

*Lections:*  
*Daniel 7.1-3, 15-18*  
*Psalm 149*  
*Ephesians 1.11-23*  
*Luke 6.20-31*