

Sermon Preached by Rev Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

All Saints and All Souls' Day C

Sunday 6th November 2022

Belonging to God and knit together as God's people

Why do we celebrate all Saints and All Souls? What on earth does a saint have to do with you and me?

Does it matter that we say in the creed that we believe in the Communion of Saints?

When I think of saints, I often think of heroes of the past who were giants of the faith whose like we shall see no more.

In the early calendars of the church the saints included were only those of the ancient past.

It left the impression that saints were a thing in the past and it's no good looking for them now as you won't find any.

They have often seemed to be too heavenly to be of earthly use and too far removed from our experience of daily life.

Can any of us possibly be saints when we are fixated on our phones, struggling with being too busy and wondering how to pay the bills.

The word saint is really shorthand for those who are belong to Christ, those who are 'in Christ'. Paul used the term to talk about his fellow Christians.

We are all Saints in that we belong to God and are in Christ as those who are baptised and blessed by the Holy Spirit.

I think All Saints Day reminds us that living the Christian life is possible. All of us belong to God and are part of God's family. It also reminds us that we are part of a larger reality.

We are joined to those who have lived before us.

As the collect says you have knit together your chosen ones in one communion and fellowship.

It is a reminder that we are joined together with other human beings who have gone before us.

They faced challenges and difficulties and were vulnerable humans like us.

They were still able to reflect the face of God and be God's person where they found themselves.

We are not called to be exactly like someone else. We are not called to be Mother Theresa or Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

We are called to be who we are.

We are each to embody the love of God in who I am, in who you are.

We are to allow God's love to flow through us and in us to grow into what it means to be Blessed in Christ.

We are called to be God's love with skin on.

You and I are called to live out who God calls each of us to be within all the limits and vulnerability and challenges of life now.

We are not on our own.

All Saints Day reminds us that someone like you and I, people who don't cope well all the time, who are sometimes

overwhelmed by the challenges we face and the transitions we are in and have no idea what the future looks like can live in hope and love.

We can each show something of God's love and compassion and be God's presence in who we are and what we do.

That is what it means to be church.

To worship and pray to God that our human lives are lifted up and shaped by God that we live Jesus' love where we are today.

We can do this no matter what awful day we've had or how fragile or short sighted each of us can be, by the grace of God as the Holy Spirit shapes us, in the footsteps of Jesus.

We can each take heart that there are plenty of odd-bods and nutcases and weirdos in the ranks of the saints – people who were flawed who still are remembered as people who revealed God's face.

There's an Abbot who was known as a gentle and loving man, a local saint who liked mead too much one night and got drunk and fell down a well and died.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta felt the absence of God's presence and could treat her fellow sisters harshly at times and yet is known for her love and compassion in being with the dying.

We are knit together, called to walk together on the Christian journey to support one another. It is only possible to be God's people together as we help each other.

It is easy at times to want to give up, that it's too hard. Even Dietrich Bonhoeffer felt the challenge and went to the USA and was very tempted to stay there for the duration of the war. In

the end he felt God's call and chose to return to Germany and face what was to come.

All of us face challenges and no one knows what the particular challenges and vulnerabilities are that we each live with, but God does.

All the saints of God have lived with those vulnerabilities because that is part of being human. Jesus lived with those vulnerabilities and shows us the way.

Blessed are you who are poor, who are persecuted who are hungry, who weep, blessed are all of you who are vulnerable, who know their own fragility as these are who God loves.

We will feast at God's table, now and in the future.

Blessed are you who are vulnerable as it is in our vulnerability that God finds us and meets us because vulnerability and crisis and challenge are part of what it means to be human.

In the end the blessings and woes and the further instructions Jesus gives his disciples are descriptions of how Jesus lived and died and was raised again.

Jesus shows us the way and encourages us to live out of the blessings of God's love upon us.

Good on you Jesus says, congratulations, you too are loved and can be loving, you too can grow and flourish as one of God's children.

If you are feeling a bit miserable or desperate that's where Christianity begins - with the desperate and the miserable -you are right where the good news takes root.

If you are disillusioned and jaded the challenge is to go and hang out with those who are hurting, whose stomach is empty whose heart is heavy because this is where Jesus starts.

We can all be saints of God because blessed are you, blessed are you.

You are blessed and knit together with all God's saints to worship and pray with all of God's saints today and always and with those who we remember today who showed us God's love with skin on.

We are knit together in a heavenly community with Jesus by the grace of the Holy Spirit part of a bigger picture and a greater reality than we can barely imagine or even dream about – the hope to which each of us is called to.

Blessed are you.

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