

The Feast of All Saints. 4th Sunday before Advent. 5 November 2023

Almighty and eternal God, you have kindled the flame of love in the hearts of the saints: grant to us the same faith and power of love, that, as we rejoice in their triumphs, we may be sustained by their example and fellowship; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

1 John 3:1-3

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Sermon: Saints Alive! Revd David Treharne, Vicar.

The church where I played the organ as a teenager... the community of the faithful in St Anne's Church, Roath, were 'saints alive.' They played a significant part in my faith journey and helped me to get to know the Lord an awful lot better, and it was a community where several seeds of vocation were sown in me. They were saints alive! It was very catholic in its liturgy and worship and my time there was a very positive learning experience.

The feast of All Saints was a big deal for them... as some of you will know if you have had any kind of Catholic or Orthodox Christian background.

We used to have the 'Litany of the saints' during worship. Google 'Litany of the Saints' and see the extensive list including...

The Blessed Virgin Mary, (ii) Angels, (iii) Patriarchs and Prophets (the last of these is always Saint Joseph), (iv) Apostles and the Disciples of the Lord, (v) Martyrs, (vi) Bishops and Doctors of the Church, (vii) Priests and Religious, (viii) Lay people.

There are **more than 10,000** saints recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, though the names and histories of some of these holy men and women have been lost to history.

In the Reformed tradition there was and is a strong reminder and emphasis that sainthood is not restricted to those so called famous characters who have been canonised and/or officially recognised as being good, virtuous and Spirit filled. Indeed when we say the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in...the communion of saints," most of us are taught that the communion of saints is made up of all men and women who have placed their hope in Jesus Christ and through baptism, are adopted sons and daughters. The communion of saints includes the living and the departed in union with God in Christ Jesus.

But even with this check and balance I think there is and always has been a hesitancy and resistance for many of us to see ourselves as part of this saintly band. "I am not worthy enough," "I am not holy enough" might be two cries many of us, if not most of us, might relate to.

Whilst maintaining a right humility about our human condition and brokenness, it is important to overcome this. There is nothing more the devil would like than for us to not realise who we are and whose we are.

St John's writes in his letter today, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, **that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!**"

We are children of God, born of God, children of our Heavenly Father... not of our own doing, not because of our works and actions, however great or lowly, but because of God's love for us in Christ Jesus and our resulting relationship with him and to him.

Those who share in the death and resurrection of Christ, as our baptism testifies, are radically changed. We are different people! We share in the life of God, and to share in the life of God means we change.

There was a quote we looked at a few weeks ago from John of the Cross... "To love is to be transformed into what we love. To love God is therefore to be transformed into God."

To be in loving relationship with our creator God has the power to transform our lives and in turn be used in the transformation of others.

The 19th Century Evangelist BW Johnson said, "To look upon him has power to change us into his glory."

This is a wonderful truth! We are changed, we are changing and we will be changed! As we claim our new identity as children of God, and live out that new identity in relationship, in union with the Spirit of Christ, and to do this even in the face of our lingering old identity as sinners... and even in the midst of ungodly cooperation with sin and evil externally around us and pressing in on us, God is changing us.

The change that God works in his children is his doing with our co-operation. And that change to becoming like God is the goal of the Christian life. As St John says today, "when Christ appears, we shall be like him." Let us never take our eyes off that goal and that firm hope of becoming more like Jesus Christ... his attitude and behaviour.

The question inevitably then comes back to us; do we count ourselves in the number, in the saintly band who see themselves as God's children on this journey of change and transformation into the likeness of Christ? Or are the saints, just those godly folks who manage to do a load of holy things whilst the rest of us muddle along enjoying our sins and our lives as much as possible, with a serious if often casual approach to the divine and perhaps a compromised attitude to living under the reign of God?

St Teresa of Calcutta fame said, "holiness is not the luxury of a few people, but a simple duty for you and me." To be holy, to be a saint, means allowing God "to live his life in us."

Whilst none of us may reach the heights of Christian perfection and action that Mother Teresa reached... although there is plenty of material that reveals her ongoing battles with her old identity and sin... we **all** have an invitation and calling for God to live in us and work through us.

This calling is part of the advancing of the reign of God... the Kingdom of God. The coming of the reign of God is to bring about the restoration of creation and redemption and reconciliation of humanity. The church, the people of God, the saints alive in God are meant to be a counter cultural **sign, instrument and foretaste** of this coming Kingdom... a sign, an instrument and foretaste of this restoration, redemption and reconciliation that the world so badly needs.

A sign, pointing to Jesus and the reign of God now, his transforming love, mercy, truth and peace. Pray for the saints being signs pointing to a new way of living in the Middle East and in Ukraine and Russia and here in the UK and in our local communities. Bright signs pointing to the light in the darkness. May we be a sign of God's reign as the church in Tidenham Parish.

An instrument, where we 'play our part' individually and collectively in the works of God. Pray that individually and collectively we can be the people God has called us to be and do the things he has called us to do... to be his hands and feet, ears, eyes and mouthpiece day to day in the world.

A foretaste of the kingdom... people who try to live now, however imperfectly and brokenly, the reality of the life of that glorious world that is still to come! Pray that we may show the reality of God's reign in us, amongst us and around us.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have invited us and called us to be part of the heavenly host. Help me, help us to respond to your invitation today and every day. May your church here be a sign, an instrument and a foretaste of the Kingdom. May we be Saints Alive!

Notices:

Baptism: next Sunday afternoon. Charlotte, Olive and Mabel

All Souls: 4pm Chase

Remembrance: more poignant than ever.

Wine Tasting: Fri 24 November .