

Revelation 7.9-17; Psalm 34.1-10; 1 John 3.1-3; Matthew 5.1-12

¹See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. John reminds us – and Revelation tells us that Jesus – the lamb of God – is with us and has always been with us...

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints Day – All Hallows Day – All Holy Day

“The saints are the sinners who keep on going.” – Robert Louis Stevenson

The words of the beatitudes are particularly striking, not only for the teaching about how to live out life in kindness and courtesay and honesty and integrity, but specifically in the places where Jesus mentions “for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.” He knew the interconnectedness and interdependence of each other and how we are entwined in faith and love within the lives of those who came before us in our families and community and faith.

There is a lovely line from a song called *We Are – Sweet Honey in the Rock* (I will post on youtube) *“We are our Grandmother’s prayers. We are our grandfather’s dreamings. We are the breath of the ancestors. We are the spirit of God.”*

And We are in a moment of time now to think not only of the ones whose footsteps we walk in, or whose shoulders we are carried on – but also to think about the legacy that we are leaving for the next generation.

What are we doing to the prophets of this age?
How will we carry our future generations on our shoulders?

This is a season to remember the grace of humility and unknowing. It is a time of recognizing there is a luminous wisdom so much more expansive than our own. We remember today – in our connectedness to the saints before – and in the spirit of All Souls, our dearly departed personal to us as well as those of faith – And we can ponder on who will be there to meet and greet us as we enter that rite of passage that connects our earthly life with the heavenly to come.

We can ponder on the wisdom of our own saints who shape us and guide us and light the dark paths of earthly challenges.

This is a time of remembering – re-remembering – bringing together the past and the present in heart, mind and spirit. In Celtic terms it is a liminal space – someone put it beautifully;

‘...a thin space, where heaven and earth whispered to one another across a luminous veil and those who walked before us are especially accessible in these late autumn days. These moments on the great turning of the year’s wheel offer us invitations and gifts for our spiritual journeys. As the earth prepares to enter winter, she sheds what she no longer needs and moves inward.’

But while we all crave the safety and comfort of the light they continue:

‘We live in a world illuminated by artificial light and so we often forget the wisdom to be gained from being in darkness. With the busyness of our lives, we resist the call of winter to fallowness and to contemplate what mortality means for us.’

So this time gives us the space and the darkness of the season invites us to enter into a wisdom of the night – where God’s love and grace shines brightest – become more know – like a candle shining the brightest in the darkness – where we realise that actually, rather than becoming ‘enlightened’ and taken to another plain – we are called to simply surrender ourselves and wrap ourselves in God’s love and allow God to guide us through the light and dark places alike.

In this current world of pandemic uncertainty – and also where people’s conviction about their idea of God can sometimes create havoc for others – this season of remembering can quieten us and allow us to enter into the mystery of the unknowing place – where we can’t know all the answers but we trust in those who have gone before and embrace their hopes and dreams – successes and disappointment - and their

wisdom of life - and we can cultivate and deepen a trust in a God who loves and calls us to love in return through living out our disciple lives – following Jesus ways through the Holy Spirit that helps us to do that.

We are surrounded ourselves by that great “cloud of witnesses” that the writer of Hebrews talks about – and we open ourselves to becoming the ‘cloud of witnesses’ of the future in the way we live our lives here on earth – today, right now.

And right now – all aspects of society are in uncertain, scary times socially, financially and emotionally – grey times that isn’t helped along by grey weather.

But let us remind each other to cling on to the gift of faith – the hope and trust of brighter days in all ways and even brighter days to come in the fullness of time.

So on this All Saints and All Souls time together – and as we enter another time of lockdown with its challenges and insecurities -I would love to tell a story of a group of monks to perhaps remind us of who we are – and whose we are...

“The monks loved to serve God in all they did. They prayed and gave weary travellers a bed and tended the sick and sang praises to God through beautiful chanting. But the years passed and the monks grew old. Although their hearts were true to God, their voices weren’t what they once were which troubled them and so they began to pray about it.

One night soon after, a stranger arrived at the monastery door. He was a traveller who had lost his way and needed a bed for the night. The monks welcomed him in and gave him hot soup and fresh bread. 'Where are you going?' they asked him. 'To the National Opera House,' the young man replied proudly. 'I am an opera singer and I have a big part to sing in the gala next week.'

'A singer?' said the Abbot. 'What a godsend! Could you possibly sing instead of us in the service tonight? Your voice would do far greater honour to God than the sounds we make.'

The opera singer was delighted to show off in front of the old men. 'I'll show them how to sing!' he thought. That night, the chapel was filled with his glorious voice, echoing through the chapel like the voice of an angel. The monks were so thrilled that they forgot to pray. They thanked the young man and went to bed, marvelling at what they had heard.

That night, the Abbot had a dream. In his dream, God spoke to him and said, 'What was the matter with my dear servants? Why did no one sing for me in the chapel tonight?'

'Lord,' said the Abbot. 'At last we could give you real praise tonight. Didn't you hear the wonderful singing?' 'I heard nothing from the chapel tonight,' said God sadly. 'Usually it is your love for me that I hear, not the quality of your voices. But that young man only loved himself, so I could hear nothing at all.'

The Abbot woke up and told the other monks his dream. They were all deeply ashamed that they had forgotten to pray to God the night before. They asked God's forgiveness and then they were filled with such joy that they thought their hearts would burst. God loved them!

He had missed them when they didn't sing! They rushed to the chapel and lifted up their voices in praise once more. In heaven God smiled. He didn't hear the feeble voices - it was their love that he heard once again.

Singing or no singing – church doors open or closed – lockdown or no lockdown – for richer or poorer – for better for worse -- let us always remember that while we stand on the shoulders of giant Saints – we too are saints on earth and called to love and be loved by God so we can love each other and support and take care of each other - and those around us in all that we are – because we are loved first and will be held through all the changing seasons of this life.

May you be blessed with encouragement and hope for days to come on this feast of All Saints and All Souls – we are never alone God is with us and within us always. Amen