

## **Julie's sermon for All Saints Day based on Matthew 5: 1-13**

Well today is All Saint's Day and of a day when we remember all those Saints who have been important to us in our Christian journey. Saint's like St Christopher who protects us when we travel or St Francis when we think about the environment and of course St John and St Paul the saints that 2 of our churches are named after. My 2 favourite Saints are St Anthony and St Jude – the patron saints of lost things and lost causes!!! (need I say more!)

There are of course many, many more Saints with a capital 'S' and all of them are saints because they have done great things in the name of God. Some have even died for their faith.

However All Saints Day is ALL saints because it is a day to remember all those who have lived or who are living their lives according to God's will. You see we are all saints with a small 's'! Yes you really are a saint (with a small 's')! Thankfully we don't have to be perfect to be a saint we just have to do our best to follow in Christ's footsteps and do as he commanded.

In our prayer and praise service on a Wednesday afternoon we have been thinking about Love being the key to all. We looked at God 's love for us, and then our love for God, one another, our enemies our neighbours and ourselves and I believe that it is love that helps us to become saints (with a small 's'). God loves us completely and unconditionally and he loves our neighbours too and even our enemies – and we are called to do the same. Jesus told us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself." And that is all part of being a saint (with a small 's') – following Jesus and doing what he did!!

That reading from Matthews gospel this morning is the beginning of Jesus teaching known as the Sermon on the Mount and these verses are called the Beatitudes. Nine times he tells us that those who follow him are blessed. In some versions like the one Caroline used it says happy – and blessed means to be deeply happy.

To be blessed by God means to feel that happiness deep down in our being; in the dark places as well as the bright ones – it means being satisfied with what we have and being happy to share it with others. Too many people spend their lives thinking, "I could be happy if only..."

And I think that is probably true for lots of people right now because the coronavirus has meant that more people than ever are feeling unhappy, stressed or afraid! And of course we have all had more time to sit and think about life and what it is all about, because in lockdown, time is what we had in abundance. Many people have thought about what is really important to them - family, friends, money, work and for some this has been really difficult because we can't see our families or visit our friends for a coffee or go shopping as freely as we once did and some have lost their jobs or are working in a very different way now. There is a lot of uncertainty and fear about what the future might look like and so they need some sort of reassurance that it will be alright. As Christians we know we can trust in God and we need not be afraid because he will be there for us but those who don't know God or Jesus don't have that and so they are afraid. There is a lovely hymn that always comes to mind when I think about not being afraid. It says

When you walk through the waters I'll be with you,  
you will never have to sink beneath the waves.  
Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you.  
I have called you by your name; you are mine.

When the fear of loneliness is looming,  
then remember I am at your side.  
Do not be afraid, ...

You are mine, oh my child; I am your father,  
and I love you with a perfect love.  
Do not be afraid, ...

It is a wonderful hymn of reassurance that God is right there with us in all things and that he knows each one of us by name and he loves us!!

And Jesus tells us in the beatitudes that God is right there with us and that we will all be blessed - those who are struggling those who are grieving and those who are trying their best to be faithful to him will all be blessed or happy; and for that we should all heave a huge sigh of relief because it means we don't have to be perfect in everything we do – we can struggle with things and God will still bless us and give us peace and happiness if we let him!!

I am sure some of us struggle with things and even wonder, sometimes, why we are doing any of it – following Jesus or helping others; and perhaps we ask ourselves will it really make a difference to our lives or anyone else's for that matter – Jesus is telling us that when we feel like that, then God is there blessing us and guiding us to see just what a difference we are making not only to our own lives but to the lives of those we are helping!

When we are grieving not just for loved ones who have died and who we miss but also for our family we haven't seen since lockdown or the independence we once had or the loss of normality and freedom we took for granted then he tells us that we can be sure that God is right there with us and comforting us and filling us with hope as we look to the future – whatever that might look like.

And for those who have been faithful to God and who follow Jesus; God's blessings are reigning down on them. Those who are meek or humble and serve others and who don't need recognition for what they are doing; they will be blessed and filled with the Holy Spirit so that they will know God is with them. Those who are merciful and pure of heart will know God's mercy for themselves and will see God in all they do. And those who strive for peace and help others to find peaceful solutions to their struggles will know that they are blessed and filled with peace.

Jesus isn't just giving us list of nice things to do or be; he is telling us that we will all experience these things at some time in our lives and that we don't need to worry when we do because God will be with us in all things.

And he is with us now in this pandemic, in this uncertain and difficult time and he will bless us with peace and courage, wisdom and strength and he will fill us with his spirit so that we will know his presence and feel his love each and every day. And when we do we can show others that he is there for them too. So many of you have been sharing the love of Christ with your neighbours already – just by your actions and words in this tough time. That little errand you did or that phone call you made or that cake you dropped off on the doorstep – whatever it is you have done it has meant that someone knew they are not alone and that someone cares! Being a saint (with a small 's') is not that difficult really; follow Jesus and put others first and never be afraid of being seen as different and of course “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.”

So go on be a saint (with a small 's') today and show someone that God knows them by name and they are his just as you are his!!

Amen