

Do you ever feel that you are not living life quite as successfully as you hoped or quite as properly as you should – whatever living life properly might mean.

On All Saints day we can be left with the feeling that other Christians have lived life wonderfully well but that we, somehow, are not quite making the grade. Is it just me? Maybe it's you too?

At moments like this the place to turn is of course the bible – but you might also encourage yourself by reading a few stories from the book of heroic failures. *(NB by Stephen Pile)*

This book cheers me up enormously as there are lots of stories of people failing and failing heroically.

How about this...

While serving on the wards of King's College Hospital in 1987, a student nurse saw a frail, elderly woman seated on the edge of a bed. 'Time for your bath' said the nurse. 'I've already had one' replied the old lady who showed some signs of confusion.

With kindly firmness the nurse led the old woman to her bath, undressed and washed her before returning to the ward.

Surprised, the nurse said 'someone else has got into your bed'. 'It's my sister' replied the old lady, 'I've come to visit her.'

Alternatively you can download the book by Miranda Hart onto your kindle – she invited people to tweet her

with their own stories of stupidity #isitjustme #NoItsUsToo because Miranda is always falling over, making a fool of herself, saying the wrong thing.

- I once locked myself out of the house wearing only a towel. I was outside for 7 hours. The worst part was when it started snowing.
- I phoned NHS direct in a panic thinking my baby was bleeding from the head. Halfway through the conversation I realised it was Ribena.
- During my wedding I laughed at my husband-to-be for messing up his vows only to forget his name entirely.

Somehow or other we muddle along through life and I can't be the only one feeling that I'm not quite the saint I ought to be.

In the New Testament the word 'saint' is used as a shorthand to refer to Christians...the saints who worship at Holy Trinity Sunningdale – that would be us. Of course through history the church took control of who was and was not referred to as a saint and only the great and the good are given the title – which is a shame, I rather like the idea of us being saints....because in truth saints are just very ordinary Christians muddling along, doing their best, trying somehow to overcome by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

One of the things I love best about being part of a church fellowship, is not having to pretend I'm perfect, sorted, achieving. One of the greatest things we can do as a saintly community is share together the highs and

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lows, success and failures of our faith journey, because when we become honest about our faith – it allows others to be honest about their faith and together we can learn to grow in faith and hope and love.

The passage of scripture set for today is described by some as Jesus manifesto for living as a saint in the kingdom of God. This passage is known as the Beattitudes (which is simply taken from the Latin Beatus which means Blessed) and it's an introduction to the long sermon on the mount which goes on to include Jesus teaching on all sorts of aspects of kingdom living.

#Is it Just Me – or is it you too, that finds these verses puzzling? In what way is someone blessed when they are poor in spirit, in what way are they blessed when they mourn? Puzzled or not – these are the characteristics of living as a saint...these verses are “the road less travelled”.

This passage of scripture is the one Bishop Stephen wants us to study and reflect on as we consider being a church that is Christ-like, Contemplative, Compassionate and Courageous. The PCC studied these verses at the beginning of their away day in September.

I shared with my small group that I found this verse puzzling “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” – and shared that I was looking forward to grappling with all these verses to gain a greater understanding of God's word and how I live life as a saint.

In reading about this, I came across an essay by Earl Palmer and there are a number of things I picked up from his essay.

Earl Palmer suggests that the model that guides the design of the whole Sermon on the Mount is the great Law Psalm – Psalm 1

That Psalm begins with blessings and ends with a parable and in between is how the righteous love the law of the Lord.

The Sermon on the mount begins with blessings, ends with the parable of the wise and foolish builders and in between Jesus explains how the Law of the Lord is to be lived.

If you use Psalm 1 as a lens you see the sermon on the mount in a different light.

The motif in Psalm 1 is one of walking – journey. It speaks about the direction you are walking – the way you go. A saint does not go the way of the wicked his delight is in the law of the Lord. A Saint takes the road less travelled.

So hold in mind that this is about the way you take. It's deliberately deciding to go the road less travelled, putting Jesus words into practice.

Earl Palmer then explores the words used in the Bible that are translated Blessed. And there are two – Asher and Barak.

There isn't time for Barak today although I'll put something about it in the version of this sermon on the church website....

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[and here it is. Barak (says Earl Palmer) could be literally translated to bow down or to stoop. So a Psalm that begins Bless the Lord O my Soul could be translated Bow down to the Lord O my Soul.

Where it says The Lord bless you – it could be, The Lord stoop down to you. Wouldn't that be a blessing!!!]

Asher literally means “to find the right road”. It’s always a Blessing to be on the right road, going the right way.

Here is my favourite Heroic Failure.

Michael and Lilian Long from Kent went on a short holiday to Boulogne in May 1987. On Easter Sunday they went out for a walk around the town. They got spectacularly lost and the more they walked, the further away they got.

They walked THROUGH THE NIGHT before hitching a lift to a village they didn’t recognise. Here they caught the train to Paris, spent most of their money and finally caught a train back to Boulogne – except after an enjoyable trip they found they were in Luxembourg by mistake. It was well after midnight and the police put them on a train back to Boulogne. On the journey, the train divided and their half went to Basle in Switzerland. Eventually the rail authorities offered them a free warrant to travel and sent them by train to Belfort thinking that’s where they were heading. Mr and Mrs Long then walked 42 miles to Vesoul, hitched a ride to Paris and finally caught the train to Boulogne but only after nearly getting on the train to Bonn in Germany. Mr Long said it was their first trip abroad and they wouldn't be leaving England again.

It’s always a Blessing to be on the right road, going the right way.

Asher, blessed, to find the right road, is used the nine times in the introduction to the sermon of the mount.

How does “to find the right road” transform your understanding of these verses if I translate it this way for you....

You’ve found the right road, when you are poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. (That’s what waits for you)

⁴You’ve found the right road, those who mourn, for you will be comforted. (That’s what waits for you)

⁵You’ve found the right road, when you are meek, for you will inherit the earth. (That’s what waits for you)

⁶You’ve found the right road, when you hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you will be filled. (That’s what waits for you)

It’s always a Blessing to be on the right road, going the right way.

On All Saints day – we think of the saints who lived before us and are now in glory. Although we rejoice at their lives, we mourn their absence. Yet we don’t have to avoid our mourning – mourning is the right road, it leads to God’s Kingdom.

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As we gain a new understanding about these verses, it opens up the reality in which we live. We are part of God's Kingdom now, but we don't experience it fully, not yet and so there are the poor in spirit and there are those who mourn.

Jesus said, the Kingdom of heaven is near – but God's kingdom is not yet fully realised.

So – we mourn the loss of those we love, but it's the right road...it leads to God's kingdom where we have this promise. There is no more mourning, or crying or pain – those old things will pass away.

To be a saint is to live in the world as it is, inspired by the vision of what it one day will be. We see glimpses of God's kingdom when we see Kingdom values being shown – kindness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control. We are delighted when God's kingdom breaks in and someone is healed or a relationship is restored, or prayers are answered for a knotty difficult situation. We live in the now where the kingdom of heaven is near, and work for the day when the kingdom of heaven will be fulfilled.

Psalm 1 says that we are on the right road when we are NOT walking the way of the wicked, but are delighting ourselves in God's Law. Saints journey on the road less travelled, the road that forgives and forgets, the road that prays for enemies, the road that gives generously without counting the cost.

Bishop Stephen has explored these verses and suggests to us that for the church to be Christ-like, it will exhibit characteristics of Compassion, being contemplative and courageous.

In the newsletter I sent out to the whole church about the PCC away day I share there our consideration about renewing the pattern of services here at Holy Trinity where the saints gather for worship.

To do that, we will need to be courageous – change is never easy.

The saints of Holy Trinity will also need to be compassionate, recognising that to walk a new path together will bring highs and lows, successes and failures – the real experiences of every day saints.

We shall also need to be contemplative, returning to a place of stillness and waiting on God to reflect on what we do and how we do it. Unlike Mr and Mrs Long on their trip to Boulogne, we shall have to stop and ask the right way. But doesn't verse 6 encourage us that the right road is to hunger and thirst for righteousness – we will be filled.

Today, the divide between those of us who are still journeying and those who are at rest in Christ is very thin. On this day we allow ourselves to remember that there is a great cloud of witnesses urging us on to live by faith, be known by love and be a voice of hope.

Perhaps the greatest gift the saints at Holy Trinity will need, is to laugh together, cry together, journey together peaceably on the road less travelled.

For those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who long to be righteous, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted....you are on the right road, the kingdom is

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yours, it's what's waiting for you. Allow yourselves to fully be present to all those emotions and experiences.

How will this inform our journey – what might we take away today from this.

Perhaps it might be that we, the saints from Holy Trinity deliberately choose to walk the road less travelled. This week I'm going to hesitate, just long enough to pray and ask – what road is this I'm taking. I'm going to live more carefully choosing deliberately to delight in the law of the Lord.

At the end of his extended sermon Jesus said

²⁴“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

May we find ourselves choosing to be on the right road –let's pray.