

11 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. **2** This is what the ancients were commended for.

4 By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did.

5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death:

7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died.

23 By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days.

31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.^[d]

32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, **33** who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, **34** quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, **40** since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, **2** and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

He said:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. **12** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

On Wednesday I was sharing my somewhat conflicted approach to thinking about the Saints.

Many of the stories of Saints have legends that are puzzling to say the least.

I think many of the miracle stories may have had their origin in something much simpler...but there again I do believe in miracles and thus the source of my conflict.

Some Saint stories are known to be false. My last church was St. Margaret's and Saint Margaret of Antioch was supposedly swallowed by Satan who appeared as a dragon, but because she was holding a crucifix she was regurgitated.

If you check that one on the Catholic website about saints – and the Catholics do love their saints! – even they admit that one has no basis in truth and there is no evidence of anyone called Margaret from the right place and era. The question has to be asked, how do these legends begin and why do they become so popular.

I guess if you lived in the middle ages with superstition then hearing of the power of the cross over Satan, dragons and anything scary it might well grow in popularity.

At our later service I'm going to prompt conversation around three saint stories.

St Kevin of Glendalough.

St Aidan of Lindisfarne.

St Francis of Assisi.

St. Kevin was said to go into a trance and a blackbird built it's nest in his hand, laid eggs, the chicks hatched and fledged.

St. Aidan, my favourite Saint, is said to have saved Bamburgh from fire. Observing King Penda of Mercia setting fire to the town, he prayed and the wind changed direction and blew the fire the other way.

St. Francis is said to have been able to speak to the birds and the animals preaching to them of the goodness of God and encouraging them to worship.

They may have happened or maybe something happened that grew into a legend, but what I object too is elevating the saints and the faith they had so far above us that there seems little connection to our lives of faith.

I'm happier in the company of the characters from the bible many of whom we heard of in the adapted reading from Hebrews 12.

I'm happier with them because we read of their faults and flaws and hearing of their struggles, triumphs and joys reassures me that my ups and downs in faith are not a failure but the real life of a real saint, because we are the saints.

But what does that really mean?

It means we seek to live by faith, with hope and with love.

We live by faith. The guiding rule in our lives is not wealth, or celebrity, or position or power but to be faithful in following Jesus. To put his teaching into practice, to be involved in building his kingdom, which is to practice

forgiveness and friendship, to care for those in need, to occupy ourselves with how best the good news can be lived and shared.

We seek to live in hope. In what?

Our hope is in the promises God has made and his faithfulness to us. Our hope is not a vague wish, but actually based in the truth of God's grace. When troubles come and disaster strikes (as it has the habit of doing) and everything seems bleak...we have hope. Hope for now and how things are and hope for the future and how things will be, both in this life and the next. Our hope means that even death no longer threatens our joy.

And as Saints we seek to live in love. How so?

Our love for each other and for the community and workplace we find ourselves is not a pink fluffy ephemeral and affected love, but a deep sense of the value of each and every person made in the image of God.

Our love overcomes different opinions. Our love is patient with each other, and let's be honest, I can be really annoying. Our love shapes the way we tackle the hard work it can sometimes be. Our love teaches us not to judge others. It can even help us not to judge ourselves.

If we celebrate all saints day and allow ourselves to be in the company of all the saints then we stand together in a great tradition of those whose ordinary is extraordinary in following Jesus Christ.

An example

I do know of a headteacher who went to a failing school and with blood, sweat tears and sheer grit has turned it

around into an outstanding and popular school. Just think of the benefit that is to all those pupils.

In two hundred years there will be a story of a headteacher who by the power of prayer stopped the rain from falling on his school because the roof leaked.

It won't be true, the truth is more ordinary....but is still extraordinary for all that.

We aren't called or expected to try and copy the saints in terms of the legends and miracles, but in the persistent and committed life of faith they sought to live, not for our reputation, but to the glory of God.

Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 3 November 2024