

Lyn Valley Mission Community

All Saints

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Rev 7:9-end 1 John 3:1-3 **Matthew 5:1-12**

In writing and reading, speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

On a wall in my family home there is a reproduction of a painting in Truro Cathedral called: Cornubia: Land of the Saints. It shows an aerial view of our neighbouring county of Cornwall lit golden in the kind of sunset that Cornwall treasures. There are cloud formations that evoke images of the Celtic saints travelling from Brittany and Ireland to bring the gospel to this land. Then across the whole landscape there are shafts of light arising from, or descending on points across the landscape: the points mark every parish church in the county, so often named for their own local saint.

The picture evokes a deep Celtic conviction that there are places where the boundary between the holy and the ordinary, heaven and earth, is very thin, places where the light breaks through and we see the communion of "in earth as in heaven". Very often, in this same Celtic tradition, those that are named "saint" (often by local recognition rather than by official church decree) are those who are comfortable living in these thin places – with, as Esther de Waal puts it, "a commitment to living on the borderland between this world and the next. Their lives held together the boundary between heaven and earth." The Welsh poet, Gwennallt extends that "holding together" to be a characteristic of the life of the church:

There is no barrier between two worlds in the Church,
The Church militant here on earth
Is one with the Church triumphant in heaven,
And the saints are in this Church which is two in one,
They come to worship with us, our small congregation,

The saints our oldest ancestors
Who built Wales on the foundation
Of the Crib, the Cross and the Empty tomb

The Crib, the Cross and the Empty Tomb: three events which supremely hold together heaven and earth. In the crib, incarnation, a human baby who is God. On the Cross the man who is God suffers all that opposition to God can conjure so that even death becomes a thin place. Beyond the Empty Tomb we glimpse the great mystery of all that is earthly and human being taken into God's eternity. Jesus pioneers life lived with no barrier between worlds and his life shows us that such life turns our way of looking at things upside down. The clearest revelation of God is offered in a helpless baby, a dying man and an empty cave.

Those we call saints are those who have in some way recognised God's mysterious presence in their own lives, in their ordinary lives, in times of great stress and persecution, and in joy and contentment. As they recognise the power of God's presence, and respond to the call to live in Jesus' way, their lives too have become thin places: places where others can see God at work, beacons of God's light and love in this world showing us something of the heaven to which we are all called. Living in Jesus' way, their lives too, show us a new way to look at where we might find holiness: a way that our gospel reading outlines for us today.

Very often when we read the beatitudes we think of them as offering a contrast, two opposite states:
the poor in spirit will get a kingdom,
those who are sad will return to happiness
the blessing is about something that will come later reversing what has gone before
Heaven reverses what we experience on earth, is one way of interpreting this – a reward in heaven....
This world, followed by the next.

But when we look at the real lives of Jesus, and those who have drawn very close to him, those we call saints, I think we see something fuller than that.

The blessing, the holiness, is about finding the second state through the first, finding the presence of God in the least expected places.

I think we learn about holiness best not by seeing the beatitudes as a list of things we have to learn to do and be by our own efforts, but by looking at the lives of those in whom we recognise holiness and discovering that they were poor in spirit, but lived the life of God's citizens in God's kingdom, they grieved for the world and yet were strengthened by the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were humble and nonviolent, meek, yet as powerful as inheritors of the world, they were driven by a hunger for what is right and justice, and yet, utterly nourished by their pursuit of it, in showing mercy they made clear that they knew themselves its recipients, the vision of God reinforced their desire to be its pure vessel, they took on the family likeness to Christ as they worked for peace....

They learned this way to be, to live as the blessed, the holy ones, as saints, as those in whom the barrier between this world and the next, earthly concerns and heavenly reality is very thin, not by working through a list of guidelines on how to behave, but by watching and following the holy one himself: by imitating Jesus and also by finding support and inspiration from those before them who had lived the same way, and with whom, in the thin place that is the church they continued to share communion and worship.

Like the Celtic fringes of our island, we, I think live in a thin place, where the beauty of the land, the power of the elements, and faithfulness of past generations offer us signs of God's close presence. Like those Celtic fringes this is not a populous or easy place to live, we are just a small congregation keeping the faith. That's why, I think sharing Celtic Christian wisdom, this feast of All Saints offers us a deep encouragement to find our own way to

holiness, our own way to reflect Christ' life in our own way of living the beatitudes by recognising the company of the saints.

I invite you, as I have in the past, to find out more about the life of a holy person who inspires and fascinates you, to see for yourself how their life was a living glimpse of the blessing of one of the beatitudes, and to allow their life to inspire some change in your own that draws you closer to Jesus, and helps you find a thin place where God's presence is near, here and now in your life.

May the love of God, and the prayer of the saints make of our churches thin places of God's love and light across our land, Amen.