

Sermon for Sunday 30 October 2022 – All Saints Sunday

Pete Postle, Reader

Daniel 7.1–3,15–18; Ephesians 1.11–23; Luke 6.20–31

May all I say and think be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

You will have noticed Halloween yesterday. It means All Hallows Eve; it's supposed to be the evening before All Saints Day, so they've done that a little bit early, and we're going to do All Saints Day and All Souls Day a little early, because November 1st is All Saints Day, November 2nd is All Souls Day, so that's in the week. As is our usual custom here, we celebrate both today.

I'd written a sermon and I wasn't terribly happy about it, so I went looking on Google. You know about Google, I'm sure. The next bit I've lifted off a sermon by a Father Simon on the Internet, and he wrote:

'When we think of heaven, we might imagine clouds and angels, harps and halos, meeting once again our loved ones in some ethereal place. The Book of Revelation, for example, shows that it will be filled with people wearing white robes, praising God, praising and worshipping freely and gladly. It is perhaps difficult to imagine oneself in such a context. It has the same effect, in a way, as those stained glass windows, depictions of people who look very holy and have soup plates behind their heads. It's difficult to think that perhaps one day we ourselves will be depicted in a stained glass window.

'But Paul, writing to the Ephesians, we've just heard it today, uses the word 'Saint' to describe all Christian people. For sainthood is the goal, what we are called to do, not necessarily how we are.' End of quote.

So let's get one thing clear at the outset. If you live your life as God intends, and as Jesus the word of God describes, you are a saint - lower case 's'. Paul's letter to the Ephesians underlines that definition, when he writes, 'I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints'; he is referring to all of us who aspire to walk in God's ways. But that gospel reading today might seem familiar, but different. If so, it's because you're used to hearing Matthew's version of the beatitudes, which begin in chapter five of Matthew, the start of his recording of the Sermon on the Mount. Today's reading, then, is the start of Luke's version of that Sermon on the Mount, and it has a very different purpose. Matthew has eight beatitudes. They start with 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'. Luke has just four. But Luke follows up those four beatitudes with four woes, which underlies the different purposes of Luke's account. Essentially, Matthew has Jesus providing a standard, a standard of perfection to which his disciples must strive.

He says, Be thou perfect as your father in heaven is perfect. And each beatitude comes with its spiritual reward. The poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It is spiritual, it is comforting, it is an opportunity for the kingdom of heaven to break through here and now. If you're not careful, you could let

Matthew's version invite you to indulge in self righteousness. There's probably that feel-good factor that has made Matthew's version to be accepted more readily than Luke's. But let's go on to a study of Luke's. Luke, the pragmatic doctor who sees the world and the disciples as they are, and his anxious they should be encouraged and motivated by Jesus's words. It helps to see the occasion in context - Luke records that Jesus has just chosen twelve of his disciples and called them to be his apostles; that is to say those of his followers charged with spreading his word. Jesus comes with those twelve to a high, The Mount, and they stand before the great crowd of his followers. If you read into that a symbolic reminder of the twelve tribes of Israel and God's charge for those tribes to spread the knowledge of the one true God, and you would expect many of that the crowd gathered there will have come to the same thought. So Jesus here in Luke is reassuring the crowd, addressing them directly - the use of 'you' - promising them as children of Israel with that sacred destiny to have courage, that things must change and that change is in their hands.

And boy, has what he described got relevance today? His audience then would have contained both rich and poor. His listeners today are very different. If you are poor, hungry, weeping, despised, can't afford to both eat and turn the heat on, your reward will come. But if you are rich, well fed, happy, laughing, respected, perhaps your investments are doing well enough. Perhaps your new car has arrived. You had your reward. Jesus challenges you to reflect on your good fortune. You're in danger. You are in danger of being self-satisfied, self-sufficient, self-righteous.

And so then follows guidance how a ruler should try to behave; what this day is all about. Love your enemy. Turn the other cheek. Give. That doesn't mean money necessarily. Give of yourself freely. So Jesus is challenging his community, challenging our community to strive to be the people of God, the children of God, to aspire to be, in short, his saints. Whereas Matthew calls upon his community to aspire to the affection that reflects God's own. Luke's gospel calls for love and mercy because that for Luke, is what lies at the heart of God. And it's love and mercy that brings us here today. Jesus is speaking to everyone here. If you feel in any way disadvantaged in life, your problems may open an avenue for you to reflect on the true ways of God. If you feel comfortably provided for, beware your benefits might have the danger of obscuring you from the true ways of God. But everyone must recognise God's need for you to exhibit love, mercy and compassion in your dealings with friend and enemy alike. For only then will we be able see a a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven here on earth as it is in heaven.

The invitation to prayer today for Penitence was this 'Since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, looking to Jesus in penitent and faith'.

Amen.