

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

All Saints | All Souls
Sunday 3rd November 2024
The Revd Andy Braunston

Introduction

November, it seems to me, is a month for memories. Remembrance Sunday is marked next week where we reflect on those who, through war and terror, have had their lives taken. On Friday the Church invited us to celebrate the memories of all those whose lives have pointed to God through their love, words and actions. Yesterday we were invited to remember those we've known and loved, saints and sinners, and so this can be a poignant time of the year. The act of remembering those we've loved and who have gone before us, those who have taught us and served as examples of faith doesn't have to hold us back. Moving on doesn't mean we've forgotten. So, in worship today, we will remember with love those whose lives have inspired us, those whose loving presence we still mourn and, through God's loving kindness, continue our journeys with thanksgiving, fun and fellowship learning to trust only in God.

Call to Worship

Come all you saints, from west and east, from south and north:
we come to worship the living God.

Come all you sinners, here find healing for soul,
and grace for the journey: **we come to worship the living God.**

Come all you searchers, find rest for your restless hearts,
and inspiration for change: **we come to worship the living God.**

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Grace

We come to worship this day, O Sovereign One,
seeking rest from our labours, balm for our souls, and Your refreshing word.

We come to worship this day, Lord Jesus, our might and our rock,
knowing you to be our light in the dreary darkness,
our compass in the journey through life.

We come to worship this day, Most Holy Spirit,
in the company of the fellowship of all who have gone before us,

who cheer us on our way, and who inspire us in our struggles.

But as we come to worship You, O Trinity of Love, we are conscious of the times

when we have neither rested nor sought your Word,
when we have neither seen you as our might nor as our rock,
when we have neither followed your light in the gloom,
nor responded well to the example of Your saints.

Forgive us, O God, and give us time to change,
that we may remain, body and soul, in your hands and be at peace. Amen.

As a father who runs to welcome home the estranged,
as a mother who gathers her chicks under her wings,
as a rock on which we stand,
God is loving and faithful and forgives our sins.
Have the strength to live as forgiven people, to forgive others,
and to forgive yourselves. Amen!

Prayer for Illumination

We lift up our heads and our hearts to You, O God,
that as we hear Your Word read and proclaimed,
our hearts may resonate with Your love,
that as we let you, the King of Glory, into our lives,
You may teach us to make a difference in our world. Amen.

Readings

Wisdom of Solomon 2: 21 - 3:9 | Psalm 24 | Revelation 21:1-6a

All Age Activity

Have some pieces of flip chart paper with the words "A Saint is" in the middle and lots of newspapers and magazines, and a glue stick. Ask the youngsters to clip out words from the papers and magazines which sum up for them the qualities of the saints. Towards the end of the service they could show their ideas to the rest of the congregation and, if you are brave, you might get a dialogue going between the older and younger folk around those ideas.

Sermon Notes

Wisdom 3: 1 – 9

Wisdom of Solomon is a first century BC text written in Greek by a Jew living in Alexandria. As such it isn't found in the Hebrew collection of what we now call the Old Testament and the Reformers entered a historic debate about whether it, along with other Greek language books, should be seen as being part of the Bible. Their decision to remove these books from the Bible were a propaganda gift to Catholics sick of being told they didn't follow the Bible well enough. Happily, the Lectionary includes some of these writings and this passage is often used at funerals dealing, as it does, with what happens to us after we die exploring themes of God's justice, the communion of saints, and life after death.

The book is divided thematically into 3 –immortality and the destinies of the wicked and righteous; Solomon and others should seek wisdom to become righteous; and wisdom and Israel where God's dealings with Israel are favourably compared to His dealings with Egypt.

Today's passage has been extended by taking the final verses of chapter 2 where the author's argument starts. Influenced by Zoroastrianism - where it was felt the original perfect world was corrupted by an evil spirit - the author asserts that all righteous souls are in God's hands and shall not perish but have eternal life. The writer doesn't explore the theme of resurrection of the dead but, instead is clear that the soul lives on with God. The writer has a deliberate concern for the soul in his writings seeing it as the essence of humanity. At the time Jewish thought held that all souls, righteous and unrighteous rested in Sheol until they were judged at the end of time. Some felt that the righteous went straight to paradise – a view taken by our writer. There may be torment and suffering in life but, for the righteous there is bliss. Vv 4-6 give a Biblical justification for the Catholic view of Purgatory which probably didn't help the Reformers be persuaded to keep the book in Protestant Bibles. The final verses in the passage give a glimpse of eternal life where righteous souls will run like sparks through stubble and where those who have been on the bottom in life will rise to the ruling class in the hereafter and where love, grace and mercy are hallmarks of the next life. At face value we all end up in the grave, or at the crematorium regardless of how we lived in life; the author of *Wisdom* urges us to look a little closer and see that choices in life have consequences in death. Seeing things at face value leads to some faulty conclusions; then as now we must resist the feeling that people suffer because they are being punished by God or that God is absent. Instead, the writer reminds us that pain and loss (whilst awful) can become places where faith, and human relationships, are deepened. The sense in the passage that our souls are in God's hands gives confidence to trust in God and God's plans for us. This gives All Saints and All Souls an edge – it's not just about looking back in gratitude and forward in hope; it's about an uncompromising trust in God – not in stewardship campaigns, not in charismatic ministers, not in contemporary music, not in brilliant worship nor even in heart warming social justice campaigns (important though all these things are) but in God alone.

Revelation 21: 1-6

Revelation is a dangerous book often preached from by dangerous people. It nearly didn't make it into the Canon of Scripture. Divine revelation can be dangerous stuff – material of ideology leading to violence. Revelation is a book of hope and promise even as it's difficult to understand with references, in code, to long forgotten people and events. It's a book which affirms God's final victory over evil but one which encourages in the long battles which come before that final victory. Revelation attracts more than its fair share of people who should not be let anywhere near a pulpit, yet the Church offers this reading for All Saints day! The writer of Revelation borrowed *Wisdom's* idea of the souls of the righteous being with God to cast his vision of the martyrs singing around God's eternal throne, so we have an image of the saints in heaven. Today's passage is often used at funerals to offer hope of a world to come where death, pain, mourning, and crying will be no more. Revelation is not meant to be a fanatic's playbook or a divinely dictated plan but, rather, a book of consolation, a vision of comfort for the distressed and persecuted. In eras of persecution the Church has always had to safeguard its primary identity of being in Christ over and against states that have wanted to subjugate and control the Church as a matter of state control. In large periods of Soviet Russia, the Church was left weak, persecuted, and slavish to the very state that persecuted it seeing subservience as the only way to survive. Passages like today's offer hope in persecution, assurance that the Christian identity and ideology is one that will triumph long after the ideologies of our age have disappeared into the history books. In an age of imperial terror these words of a new heaven and earth, a new Jerusalem offered hope that things would get better, that the brutal Roman Empire – we might say all subsequent brutal empires – would not have the last word. We can read this passage in solidarity with all who are and who have been persecuted stretching back to the first century Roman streets to the struggles from the Church in contemporary Nicaragua to the drug infested slums to the Mafia dominated villages where the Church might be the only incorrupt institution; from the labour camps in China to the prison cells in Iran. These words give comfort to those who suffer for their faith in Christ. These are words that sustain, and have sustained, Christians throughout the ages - Christians with whom we are in communion.

Weaving The Threads

All Saints and All Souls remind us the doctrine of the Communion of the Saints is rather more than a spiritual union with other believers in the here and now but that we are united with all those who have gone before us and who cheer us on like spectators at a race. In the contemporary Church we have become very good at proclaiming the coming Kingdom with a powerful emphasis on the values of that Kingdom in the here and now; we're less good at preaching on the soul and the afterlife. All Saints and All Souls gives us powerful texts with which to address these themes.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God, creator of all that is,
the One in whose hands the souls of the righteous rest,
the One in whom we find safety and security.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh,
the One whose hands and side were pierced for us,
the One in whom we find renewal and rest.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, fire of divine love,
the One who animates the Church from age to age,
the One who makes us like sparks in the stubble.

And we believe in the Church,
the one that's meant to be united, holy, universal, and apostolic,
but is often found faltering and failing.
Yet it contains all the saints and sinners of old, who, like us, were called
to trust in God alone. Amen.

Intercessions

As God's people, held in the security of God's hand,
we watch and wait for the long-promised new heaven and new earth,
and pray to the Most High saying:
O God have mercy **and wipe away our tears.**

We pray for Your Church, here on earth, O God,
often broken, often unholy, often exclusive,
and often out of touch with its radical roots,
and pray that You will give us the grace
to become a true communion of saints, valuing unity in diversity,
showing exciting holiness, demonstrating the wideness of Your mercy:
O God have mercy **and wipe away our tears.**

We pray for the world wherein we live out our discipleship, O God,
a world at war, a world we heat beyond endurance, a world divided,
yet a world of beauty, ingenuity, and startling energy
with the potential for renewal;
Help us, O God, to destroy the shroud of death,
the weapons of war and the rule of wealth,
that your Kingdom may come.
O God have mercy **and wipe away our tears.**

We pray for this community, O God,
dwell in our midst, let us be a habitation of peace,
a place of refuge and safety, a source of healing and support.
O God have mercy **and wipe away our tears.**

We remember those we've loved and lost,
those whose faith, care, wisdom and example inspired us on our way,
who now, in your tender love, take their rest.
O God have mercy **and wipe away our tears.**

As You have sustained Your saints throughout the ages, O God,
we pray that You sustain us; keep us faithful in Your service,
help us to place our trust only in You, until your Kingdom comes.
And so we pray as Jesus taught, Our Father...

Offertory

The saints gave; they poured out their lives in service of God, often at great cost to themselves. They strove to embody the loving presence of God – often getting it very wrong – but always seeking to make a difference for the sake of the Gospel. They gave of their time, their talents, and their treasure. Now they urge us to do the same, standing around us as an unseen cloud of witnesses and cheering us on as we run the great race which is Christian discipleship.

We give in any number of ways – the charities and causes which make a difference, through quiet loving service, through offering a shoulder to cry on and a listening ear, and, of course, through our financial contributions where we are able. So, let's give thanks for all that's been given:

Loving God,
You give us so many good things,
and we ask Your blessing on the gifts of time, talent, and treasure,
that animates our church and shows our fidelity to you.
Help us to use the resources we have wisely, carefully, and sensitively,
that those who come after us will give thanks for our faithful witness. Amen.

Holy Communion

God be with you! **And also with you!**
Lift up your hearts! **We lift them up to God!**
Let us give God our thanks and praise! **It is right and proper to do so!**

It is our duty and joy, at all times and in all places, Eternal One,
to praise and acclaim You - the One all creation reveres.
All the angels and the heavenly powers cry out to you in endless praise

and so we join in with their song:

There are any number of versions of the Sanctus that could be used here from the spoken words listed in RS 12 or CH4 651 to a range of sung versions. The Sunday Service version I am using uses a song from Brian Doerkson, Holy is the Lord, arranged as a Sanctus. There are many sung versions around and the little book [Tunes We Know](#) is an excellent resource.

Holy are you, Sovereign One,
heaven and earth are filled with your glory.
The glorious choir of apostles sings to you,
the noble company of prophets praises you,
the white-robed army of martyrs glorifies you,
the holy Church throughout the ages proclaims you,
Source of life and love, worthy of adoration with the Son, Jesus Christ,
and the Holy Spirit, our advocate, comforter, and helper.

You, O Jesus, are the King of glory,
but Your reign shows the strength of weakness not power,
the force of love, not valour,
the quiet wisdom of the ages, not the loud noise of men.
You are the everlasting image of the Creator.
When you resolved to save humanity,
you did not scorn women, the poor, nor the outsider,
but overcame the sting of death and opened wide the gates of Heaven
to those who put their faith in you.
You are seated now in glory, the merciful judge who is to come.

We here, long to be gathered up to You,
and so we come to this Your table in obedience to Your command
to show forth Your sacrifice on the Cross by the bread broken and the wine poured.
As we eat and drink, we know that You, risen and ascended,
are present with us giving Yourself
for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

For we have received from You, Lord what we also hand on,
that on the night when You were betrayed,
You took a loaf of bread, and when You had given thanks,
You broke it and said,

‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’

In the same way You took the cup also, after supper, saying,

‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’

For as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup,
we proclaim Your death until You come.

Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith:

Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

Come, Most Holy Spirit,
that we may have communion with the body and blood of Christ
as we eat and drink this bread and wine,
sanctify us that as we become the body of Christ,
we are united with Jesus and the whole Church on earth and heaven.
As we gather at this table to present our sacrifice of thanksgiving
and renew the offering of ourselves, give us joy in the promise of Jesus' coming in glory.
Day by day, we bless You, Eternal Trinity of Love,
and praise Your name for endless ages evermore. Amen.

The holy gifts of God are for God's holy people. Let us share these gifts.

*Adapted from the ICEL version of the Te Deum
and the Basis of Union*

Post Communion Prayer

Lord of heaven,
you have brought us near to an innumerable company of angels
and to the spirits of the saints made perfect:
as in this, the food of our earthly pilgrimage,
we have shared their fellowship,
so may we come to share their joy in heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*a prayer listed in various
Anglican books for All Saints.*

Blessing

May the God, the source of all consolation,
wipe away every tear from your eyes.
May God, the Word made flesh, renew you.
May God, the Holy Spirit,
Hold you safe in divine love.
And may the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Be with you all, now and always, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	Stf	MP
For All the Saints	658	740	745	148
Glory To You O God, For All Your Saints in Light		741		
Rejoice in God's Saints		742		
For All Our Saints			746	
Jesus invites His Saints (try this to Diademata doubling up the verses)	434			
Going Home, Moving On			734	
Ye Gates Lift Up Your Heads On High	681			
Hark How the Adoring Hosts Above (when sung to Lyngham 'O For A Thousand Tongues' this is great fun.)		744		

RS – *Rejoice and Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

Day by Day from *Godspell* makes a good opening music.

The new supplement to CH4 suggests two additional hymns for All Saints. One by Ruth Duck to a DCM tune: *Thank God for Saints of Seasoned Age* and another by Alan Luff which can be sung to *Woodlands Called to be Saints! To Walk the Pilgrim Way*.