

Bible Readings

Matthew 5:1-12

Revelation 7:9-17

Hymn: 740 For all the saints

https://youtu.be/VHVv79W_EpA

Reflection

In the name of...

Our first Bible reading this morning from the Gospel of Matthew is that very familiar passage from the Sermon on the mount that we know as the beatitudes. This passage is one of the most beautiful, poetic, meaningful and memorable of the New Testament. It's a strange word 'Beatitude' in the dictionary we are told it means 'Supreme blessedness or happiness'. As a young Christian I was told that it is the attitude that we have to have, to be blessed – it is the reward that we receive.

It has been called the Christian Manifesto as it outlines not only the expectations of followers of Jesus but also the result – the blessedness – of those expectations being achieved or worked out. The Greek word '*makarios*' which is translated as blessing was described by William Barclay as "that joy which has its secret within itself, which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained, which is completely independent of all changes and chances of life." This is the joy that Jesus speaks on in John 16:22 'the joy that no-one can take away from you'.

Over the years I've questioned that first very simple understanding that blessedness is a future reward for righteous living. Rather blessedness or sainthood – is how we are to 'BE' now. It is how we are expected to live as the children of God. It is not speaking of a reward for doing something right rather it's a loving response to God's call to be one of his beloved children. God calls us and then expects us to live in a certain way and it is through trying to live in that way, in relationship with God, that we receive this feeling of joy or blessedness that no-one and no-thing can take away.

The Beatitudes, then, outline the blessed nature of those who live in a certain way. It is, if you like, a manifesto of sainthood, a series of attributes which most of us will aspire to and try to attain, but never be perfect at. The Beatitudes are not just about some future joy, or beauty or pleasure or just about the promise of some future glory. They are all about living in God's Kingdom now. They are the outworking of present sainthood.

Our second reading is from the Book of Revelation which is a visionary book about the end times or the apocalypse. The writer of the book of Revelation uses a lot of symbolic and strange almost science-fiction language and graphic imagery to explain what he 'sees'.

In this section the writer is outlining the opening of the "seven seals" of truth and revelation, and the sixth has just been opened. He describes the multitude of saints from every nation that surround the throne of the Lamb. It's a passage that speaks of safety, and peace and healing and echoes some of the words and ideas of the 23rd Psalm those of the loving Shepherd who leads his flock to the living waters of eternal life. Where every tear shall be wiped away, where there will be no sorrow only joy.

I'm sure you can all think of many examples of Saints that you have known or heard of, those who remain in your mind for the way they lived their lives for the vision and work for Christ that they fulfilled. One I can think of is George Macleod.

In 1938 George MacLeod was a young captain emerging from World War I with a profound sense of God and a disillusioned notion of politics. His awareness for social justice was as real as the grit and grime he saw daily on the faces of the unemployed in Govan, Glasgow, where he was the parish Minister. He saw the ruined medieval stones of Iona Abbey and felt that they cried out to him to rebuild their resplendence and he spent his life working to achieve it. He responded to the visions of a restored Iona Abbey, and a transformed church that would reconcile people and denominations from all over the world, a church that would become the Iona Community. He spoke of Iona as being a "thin place", a place with only "a tissue paper separating heaven and earth."

All Saints Day always makes me think of another 'thin place', when the saints gather for the celebration of Holy Communion the distance between heaven and earth is as thin as gossamer. It is at the Lord's Table that heaven and earth meet. It is here that all the Saints of heaven and earth are joined in worship and praise.

Can you imagine for a moment, not just that image of the Lord's table but an image of a symbolic table being stretched out before you and all around it sit people who matter to you, who influence you and who have influenced you. They may be alive or dead, prophets of the past or family members of the present, they may be intimate contacts or people you have never met, they may be people you have learned about whose written words have spoken to you, they may be of greater or lesser importance – but because they matter to you, because they have had a place in your thoughts and your emotions they are part of you, forever at one with you, they are round your table – and so they are for you your communion of saints. From time to time either consciously or sub-consciously, sometimes without any particular knowledge that it is happening, you commune with them, you sit down round the table and talk and listen, and learn and absorb, from all those influences on you. And, like the prophets of old, you carry away what you need, of insight and clarity, of direction and decision, of support and comfort and blessing.

Today is All Saints Day when we remember all those in heaven and on earth who are dear to us who we hold in our hearts and who our loving Lord holds in his heart too.

The Collect

Almighty God,
you have knit together your people in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord:
Grant us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that we may come to experience that inexpressible joy that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and

reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Hymn: 739 The Church's one foundation

<https://youtu.be/FHCqXL3mCwU>

Prayers for Others:

Prayer intercession – (based on the Beatitudes)

God of all blessedness,
we turn to You now with our prayers for others,
seeking Your blessing on all for whom we pray.

You tell us:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
So we pray for those whose spirit fails them,
that they might be strengthened in their faith;
for those whose poverty is physical,
that they might have an equal share
in the fruits of Your kingdom;
for those whose outlook on life is poor,
that they might have a glimpse of hope and purpose.

You tell us:

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
So we pray for all who are cast down by grief –
from recent losses or a deep-seated sorrow over many years –
that they might know the comfort of hope,
the comfort of love, the comfort of new life.

You tell us:

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
So we pray for leaders and followers,
for big people and little people,
for the proud and the humble,
that in acceptance and grace,
we might work together for the good of all.

You tell us:

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

So, we pray that we,
who seek to live in that very righteousness,
might indeed be filled with wonder and joy.
We pray as well for those
who will be physically hungry this day
that they will receive the help they need and
the food they need for life.

You tell us:

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will receive mercy.
So, let us accept your forgiveness
and forgive others accordingly,
that we might know and understand
the true meaning of forgiveness.

You tell us:

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
So, make our hearts pure,
that we might know Your love all the more.

You tell us:

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called the children of God.
So we pray for all who work for peace:
peace in relationships; peace in communities;
peace in politics; peace in places of conflict;
peace for the body, mind and soul ...
that all might see themselves and others as God's children.

You tell us:

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

So we pray for the broken and despised,
the marginalised and the downtrodden,
the victims and the dispossessed,
the refugees and the homeless.
We pray also for those whose lives have been affected by the
earthquake in Turkey and Greece
and those whose lives have been affected by the typhoon in the
Philippines
and for all whose lives have been affected by the Covid virus
This kingdom, our precious kingdom,
belongs also to all of them.

And as we pray for others,
we pray also that you will hold us always in communion
with the Saints of all the ages,
those who have been blessed and whose memories,
example and closeness bless us,
even at this present time.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Benediction

Go now, with the blessings of the saints and angels.
Go now, with the blessings of the people in this fellowship.
Go now, with the blessings of the whole people of God.
Go now, with the blessings of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
to keep you in blessedness, now and always. Amen