

PARISH COMMUNION – 5 NOVEMBER 2023 – ST HELEN’S & ST PETER’S

Hymns: *Stand up, stand up for Jesus ... We bring you
Lord our prayer and praise ... All heaven declares ...
... For all the saints ...*

This was an All Age Communion Service for All Saints & Safeguarding Sunday Richard was the Celebrant and Preacher



(No YouTube this week so previous photos used)

Laurence read the Gospel – Matthew 5:1-12

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Richard’s Sermon Notes

For those who are parents, think for a moment about your favourite child. I know we’re not supposed to, but we all do, don’t we? If your not a parent, think of your favourite brother, or sister, or parent or friend. Why are they your favourite? Most like you in personality, temperament, or shared interests? Most successful in life - high achiever? Brightest and most academic? Or perhaps your favourite is the one causing you least stress and anxiety at the moment!

OK, I was kidding, it would be outrageous if we loved our children based on their achievements, their personality or their hobbies! We love them for who they are, not for what they do. Each of our children are precious to us. We may love them distinctly, and love different things about them as individuals. But we love them the same amount!

We sometimes struggle to imagine that God loves us as precious individuals as much as he must have loved St Peter, or St Helen for that matter. Or St Francis or St Alban. God does not have favourites! Each and every one of us is unique, special and precious to him. So All Saints is about remembering the heroes of the faith - but also about each of us and our journey of faith as we seek to live as followers of Jesus. Easy to think how God would love a hero of the faith like Mother Teresa. But just sit for a few seconds and feel the warming smile of God’s love as he gazes at you...
... Now think about someone who is really precious to you - a child, sibling, partner or friend. Thinking about someone you love deeply. Imagine you discovered that someone planned to hurt that person, they were going to deliberately damage and permanently harm your loved one. It’s stomach turning isn’t it? Almost unimaginable. Makes you feel sick. Incomprehensible that someone should choose to damage someone we love.

If you’re like me, you’d do anything you could to protect your loved ones. It’s what it means to be family - we do what we can to keep our loved ones safe, whether they are our aging parents, our brothers or sisters, nieces and nephews, or our own children. Just as we’d go to extraordinary lengths to protect our loved ones, we find it really hard to remain calm, rational and proportional in responding if they are harmed. The same is true for the Christian family of the church. God’s family. We are called by God to love our neighbour as ourself.

Jesus Sermon on the Mount is revolutionary teaching. It literally turns the values of the world upside down. The form of beatitudes, “*Blessed are those who... for they shall...*” was a common rhetorical or didactic device. Our modern translation “*blessed*” doesn’t really do it justice. “*Congratulations, or I recommend...*” These qualities are to be envied and emulated; they make up ‘the good life’ which Jesus commends to his followers. May have been a common form of expression... But God’s kingdom, the place where he reigns and rules turns out to be very different to that which people expected. And 2,000 years later, the values Jesus calls us to are as shockingly radical today as they were when he used them to introduce his sermon.

Jesus is announcing that God’s kingdom is breaking in upon the world ...

- He tells us it is the meek, and not the mighty who will inherit the earth.
- Those who show mercy to their adversaries are blessed in God’s economy.
- It is the peacemakers and not the fighters who are children of God.
- It is those who are mourning the death of loved ones who will know the presence and comfort of God.

These Promises seem particularly pertinent - but hard to cling to as we watch the news emerging from the Middle East.

All Saints': We are all precious in God's sight. You, me, the person sat next to you. The person you don't get on with especially well. The person you find rather tedious, your political opponent. I know it's annoying at times, but each and every one of us is equally precious to God.

Here's the thing. In the upside down topsy turvey values of the Kingdom of God, God places a priority on the orphan, the widow, the migrants. In Matthew chapter 25 he says whatever you did for the homeless person, the prisoner, the person at the foodbank, you did for me! The two most obvious vulnerable groups in a community are the very young and the very old, but any of us can be vulnerable at times whether by illness or circumstance.

Whatever we do for the most vulnerable groups in society works to build the Kingdom of God here on earth. This includes our charitable gifts over £10,000 per year to children in Congo, Children's Society in UK and locally to the vulnerable in Luton through Azelea. It includes the St Helen's Fellowship, the welcome we extend to the isolated through The Monday Social, our care of the bereaved, those who volunteer at community projects like the Foodbank. It also includes everything we do to create a culture where all people, especially vulnerable adults and children are safe from harm in our church family and wider community.

Safeguarding: What it looks like for us as a community is that we all play a part. For most of us, it will just be keeping eyes and ears open. Anything that makes you uneasy or uncomfortable, have a word with our Safeguarding Team. As examples: an elderly and frail friend says a neighbour buys her milk, but charges £5 for getting it; someone has bruises that can't easily be accounted for; recently widowed, losing an awful lot of weight and you're concerned they are neglecting themselves.

The Church of England provides excellent, free, online training and information about Safeguarding. Anyone can go online and find out more. We'll publish the links in a future email. Training is available to all, but required for those who volunteer with vulnerable adults or children and all our leaders such as ministers and PCC members. For others its more in depth. Involves making sure when we recruit people to join the team, we make appropriate checks to recruit safely following guidelines set by the church nationally. For the safeguarding team it involves following up on queries made by congregation members.

Favourite children: having one boy and one girl means I've been able to say Lauren, don't tell your brother, but your my favourite daughter! And vice versa to Sam. They got their own back a few years ago with a

Father's Day card saying, "Dad, you're definitely up there as one of our favourite parents!"

This All Saints' season we remember that God doesn't have favourites, all of us are precious to him. The good news is that in the Beatitudes at the start of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus announces that things are finally changing and the Kingdom of God is breaking into the world. An upside down kingdom where the most vulnerable are especially valued and cared for. And on Safeguarding Sunday we commit to do all we can to make sure everyone in our church family is safe from harm.

Richard then led these Prayers:

We pray that our church would be a community where all are safe ... Dear God, Help us to be a church that: Loves, welcomes, protects; Listens, learns, serves; Repents, restores, transforms; Values, cares, believes.

*God of Justice and compassion, **hear our prayer.**
Help us, heal us, guide us, we pray, in Jesus name.
Amen.*

Into the dark places of our world where people are frightened and hungry,

God, bring your light and your love.

Into places where people are violent, into places where people are fighting,

God, bring your light and your love.

Into the places where we feel unsafe, into situations that hurt us and scare us,

God, bring your light and your love.

We ask these prayers in the power of your Holy Spirit and in the name of your Son, our saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Lindy Clay led further prayers of Intercession



Notices:

1. Chancel Coffee & Fellowship as usual this week.
2. Remembrance next Sunday: Service of the Word at 10am then an outdoor Service at War Memorial 10:45am.
3. Developing Disciples Taster Evening 15 Nov 7pm.
4. For Pastoral Care or a Home Communion Visit please contact Mel on 01582 834031.