

Sermon 3 November 2019

Ephesians 1:11 – end and Luke 6:20-31

What do you think of when you hear the word 'Saint'? Do you perhaps think of the patron saints: David, George, Andrew or Patrick? Or perhaps you think of Peter? Or some of those gory stories where men and women were killed for their faith? Or more modern saints like Mother Theresa who are remembered for their deeds?

Well, this introductory section to the letter to the Ephesians describes the recipients of the letter as 'saints'. In other words, ordinary Christians. You are not a saint because of what you might have accomplished, no you are a saint because of who you are in Christ.

So, this morning, from this lovely vantage point, I'm looking at a whole load of saints. We are all saints. And those who are no longer with us, but worshipped with us, worked with us, loved us, are saints. And those who are yet to come will be the saints of the future. We are also sinners. Being a saint doesn't bring with it any moral superiority. We try to work out how best to follow Jesus, making mistakes as we go, and hopefully helping each other.

This early part of the letter to the church in Ephesus sets out their place in the world. Ephesus has a remarkable similarity to Bristol. A sea port, slightly inland, with a steep main street leading down to a library. It was a rich, cosmopolitan city. And so, we can be confident to place this reading into our own context.

The church in Ephesus was advised that its place is in the world and that they had been chosen by God, marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit. And chosen doesn't mean that they are special, set apart, no it means that they are chosen to be part of the world so that the world would be blessed through them, because of their faith in Jesus. And that they should live to praise Christ in his glory.

Living to praise Christ in his glory is something other than turning up to sing songs of worship. It's about how lives are lived. How we become an instrument of God's purpose.

The writer refers to the power of Jesus' death and resurrection and it's good to remember that when people say that our faith should be personal and private, that Jesus lived a very public ministry and that his death was both public and very political. When Paul proclaimed Jesus as Lord, he was making a political statement. This letter isn't just a spiritual statement.

So, our faith can and should inform the way we respond to what is happening in our world. The words Jesus spoke should inform the way we think about things and our

practical response. We can have the gospel at the heart of our political thinking and our engagement with the world. For we worship God, not nation or personal advantage.

And being people of God it is good to remember our source. To use a now long past electoral slogan – we can go back to basics.

What are our basics?

To love the Lord our God and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

And to consider Jesus' words about the blessings and the woes. We've heard the words in our gospel reading.

We are called to see the world differently, and to work for a world that is changed: a world where God's generosity benefits the downtrodden and the broken hearted.

Rich, satiated, carefree, and respectable people can share in the new existence God has instituted, but maybe only to the extent to which they also join in Christ's calling to enter into true solidarity with those who find themselves destitute, underfed, mournful, and vilified. To find ways to give dignity to the poor, despised, oppressed, powerless and degraded. To support those who are getting lost in systems that become ever more complex. To speak out against the rise again of the prosperity gospel.

Jesus doesn't give us a rule book, a list of dos and don'ts, which we can tick off and think job done, that's me up on the moral high ground. He wants us to learn to love, to create a culture that is sustained by God's mercy, not our own agendas.

Jesus is tirelessly working to bring everything and everyone together and we are participants in that work. We can do that as we let our hearts be changed, as we become people of prayer, as we inform ourselves about deep injustices and work out how to help be the instruments of change.

For we are a community, living each of us within many different communities, all overlapping. We remember the lives of saints who have been part of our communities. We seek to be a blessing to the saints who are currently part of our communities. We seek to be saints in the world, not set apart.

I'd like to finish with a sonnet by Malcolm Guite – one of three he offers for All Saints day – Thanksgiving.

Sarah Thomas

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