

St Andrew's on The Terrace Sunday 28 October 2018 Pentecost 22
'All saints and All souls and All reformers'

Readings for the Gathering

Gospel

Luke 4:16-30

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of God is on me, / because he has anointed me / to proclaim good news to the poor. / He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners / and recovery of sight for the blind, / to set the oppressed free, / ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of God's favour." ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. ²³ Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" ²⁴ "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Epistle

Hebrews 12:1-3

¹² Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Contemporary reading

'A last Beatitude'

by Malcolm Guite

<https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/tag/all-saints/>

And blessed are the ones we overlook;
The faithful servers on the coffee rota,
The ones who hold no candle, bell or book
But keep the books and tally up the quota,
The gentle souls who come to 'do the flowers',
The quiet ones who organise the fete,
Church sitters who give up their weekday hours,
Doorkeepers who may open heaven's gate.
God knows the depths that often go unspoken
Amongst the shy, the quiet, and the kind,
Or the slow healing of a heart long broken
Placing each flower so for a year's mind.
Invisible on earth, without a voice,
In heaven their angels glory and rejoice.

The Reflection for the Gathering

There's been a lot of interest recently in getting your DNA tested. Intriguing results come back in the mail – people are surprised to find there is Scandinavian or American blood in their veins – or they have connections back to the 'Iberian peninsula'. It leads to speculation on how and why and where

and who. I wish my father's cousin were still alive to get tested. Put a silver helmet on him and he would have looked the image of a Spanish conquistador, rather than the eastern southland farmer he was.

Through ancestry .com we can indulge our fascination with the past. Reverence of ancestors and respect for forebears is an ancient custom. We don't have to be archaeologist or anthropologists to know why. When our loved ones move from this reality to whatever lies next, we remember them in small ways and large, we keep mementoes, we visit memorials, we use their names for offspring which follow. In many different ways – probably as different as we are from each other, and all over the world, we keep faith with those who have gone before.

In Jesus time it was the prophets who were revered, and their words remembered. The Gospel reading shows Jesus going to the synagogue, his usual custom, and as a member of that synagogue he gets to read the scroll – on this day a scroll from the prophet Isaiah, a prophet with amazing stature in the Jewish community. Jesus aligns himself with this “saint”, one of the ancient forebears of the Jewish faith. What's more, Jesus claims Isaiah's words as describing his *own* mission to the world, a mission to do with the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, and the oppressed. He is claiming the *mana* of the prophet to underwrite his own just-beginning ministry.

The reverencing of saints developed in early Christianity beginning with reverence paid to the early martyrs. A martyr is defined as “...someone who suffers persecution and death for advocating, renouncing, refusing to renounce, or refusing to advocate a belief or cause as demanded by an external party. This refusal to comply... results in the punishment or execution of the martyr by the oppressor.”¹

In early Christian times these included many ordinary people who lost husbands, wives and children, but also famous martyrs such as those killed during the the 2nd to 4th centuries a period known as the Age of Martyrdom

According to early Christian tradition or with some historical attestation within a hundred years of the event these include:

- Polycarp of Smyrna
- Justin Martyr
- Scillitan Martyrs
- Perpetua and Felicity
- Ptolemaeus and Lucius
- Pothinus, bishop of Lyon, with Blandina and several others, the "Martyrs of Lyon and Vienne"
- Pope Fabian
- Saint Sebastian
- Saint Agnes
- Felix and Adauctus
- Marcellinus and Peter
- Forty Martyrs of Sebaste
- Euphemia
- Cyprian

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews the writer later lists in that great ‘faith’ chapter almost everyone from the beginning of the Jewish faith who had lived well and died well for it. About verse 35 he names especially the martyrs of those early centuries:

“³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated — ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They

¹ wikipedia

wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. ³⁹ These were all commended for their faith.”² Are we worthy to be those who follow them now?”

Martyrs are not restricted only to those persecuted and killed by the Roman Empire in the early centuries of Christianity. Whenever strife has broken out because of religion or individuals have been challenged to be quiet about their faith or to renounce it, martyrs have been created.

The word has been a little devalued for us because of a more contemporary definition of the word martyr in psychology where

...a **person** who has a **martyr** complex, sometimes associated with the term victim complex, desires the feeling of **being a martyr** for his/her own sake, seeking out suffering or persecution because it either feeds a psychological need, or a desire to avoid responsibility.”

The true martyr is one who does not seek suffering, but for the goal of being true to their faith will endure it.

We speak in secular culture of those who are martyred for causes not necessarily recognised as specifically religious. Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Ghandi and Malcolm X are what could be called political martyrs; Thomas More for his stand against Henry VIII is a notable martyr.

Early veneration of Christian martyrs from the first few centuries of Christianity led into creation of saints – one reason being that martyrs were seen as moving directly into the presence of God and so were prayed to for their ability to intercede with the divine and so too with saints. Often they were seen as an extra route to God.

One official definition of a saint is as a “...person who is recognized as having an exceptional degree of holiness or likeness or closeness to God.”³ This is the high definition of saint – often such saints are officially vetted and very officially recognised by the Roman Catholic or other churches. In this way we can get an impression that sainthood is only for a select few and using this ‘holiness’, ‘closeness or likeness to God’ as criteria, it is not surprising not all of us will achieve that definition.

It is these forebears, these martyrs and saints, the ones who have gone before us that the writer to the Hebrews cites as the great cloud of witnesses who now, in his theology, watch our progress.

From the formation of the Lutheran church at the reformation the term saint has also come to be used for those living now who follow the Jesus Way. You don’t have to be especially holy, close to or like God to be a saint in this sense. We are all saints – and a liberation theology approach would say that *all* people, not just those in church are saints – that saints can be found in the most unexpected places.

The official saints of liturgical churches are revered for their own sake and reputation but also as role models of what holy living can and should be like. In the same way, we look up to and remember others who have been influential in our lives as saints and reformers, as prophets and preachers, both in our spiritual and religious lives and in the secular circles in which we move. I have ministers but also teachers in my particular panoply of saints, one or two entertainers, an actor or three, the occasional political leader. And some of the saints in my list are the kind of people found in Malcolm Guite’s sonnet for all saints – the ones he says can be sometimes overlooked. Their names are written near the back of the order of service every week in our rosters and appear in the notices. They keep the wheels of this place turning round each week and month and often all they get for it are tired feet and aching backs!

Think through those by whom you have been influenced by for the good, perhaps you’ll find among them a quiet unassuming person like those whose church roles are named in the sonnet. As Guite says: “God knows the depths that often go unspoken amongst the shy, the quiet, and the kind”

² Hebrews 11: 35-39

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint>

As the world mourns the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi and what seems to be the death of civility in politics, let us remember this day saints and reformers who stand up and are counted and all too often shot down in different ways.

And let us also remember our own dear departed – most recently Alastair Matthews and Douglas Wood – and other souls dear to us too particularly at this time of year when the Celts believed there was an especially thin space between the living and the dead.

In response, may we “run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.” So may it be.

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Around the church you will see three stations – there are pictures there of people of influence, some saintly some not, some spiritual some not, some to your taste and some not.

You are invited over the next few minutes to go to each station and write down the names of those who come to your mind as people who influenced you.

Write the name on the post it pad papers and stick them to the boards.

This is a reflective activity but not a silent one. Feel free to talk with the person near you about who you chose to write down and why and who they have written down and why.

Your names do not have to be famous ones, they may be people known only to you in this room. Let's celebrate them all

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