

All Saints Sunday 01 November 2020

This time last month I welcomed everyone to the first service in the benefice for a long while. I thanked all those in all our churches who had been looking after both the buildings and the community diligently during the months of church closure. I want to thank those same people who will once again be caring for our churches and the people they serve. In particular this week I want to thank again the church wardens and others meeting regularly to try and sort out a way forward for our Benefice in the absence of a rector.

This week I am welcoming people to a service in St Mary's Radnage, that will be the last in the benefice for some weeks at least following last night's announcement of a second national lockdown in England.

Stephen Bishop of Oxford sent all clergy a note last night which opened with this passage from Isaiah: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you" (Isaiah 43.2)

He reminded us all that we need to hold firmly to our faith and hope in Christ at this time and care for our communities with all the love which God supplies. The Church needs to be strong and, as much as we can, continue to be a light shining in the darkness.

Collect

God of Holiness

Your glory is proclaimed in every age

As we rejoice in the faith of your saints, inspire us to follow their example with boldness and joy

Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

Readings

Revelation 7: 9 to end

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing,

'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.'

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

1 John 3: 1 - 3

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is

revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Matthew 5: 1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'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 receive 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 for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Reflection (as preached at St Mary's, Radnage on 1st November 2020)

- How many of you have seen the advertising campaign for children in need?
- There are a series of cartoons of people needing help – the caption for which is that we all need heros but goes on to say that even heros need help (in this case of course they mean money)
- The ads finish with the slogan 'together we can change lives'
- It reminded me of that story of someone on a beach of washed up starfish throwing them back....
- And that is so very apt for today, as the church celebrates the first Sunday in what it calls its 'Kingdom' season – that time when we think of those who are no longer with us – those we have loved and lost (All Souls day), All Saints day (which is today in the church calendar) and Remembrance Sunday
- Our gospel reading today does not specifically mention Saints but talks about who will be blessed in God's kingdom, when it arrives in all its fullness
- This well known passage is called "the Beatitudes", or blessings.
- Ironic really – I wonder how many of us, or those in churches throughout the country this morning, are feeling blessed!
- And yet – despite yesterdays news, perhaps we do feel blessed...
- Blessed because we remain largely fit and healthy, as do our loved ones
- Blessed perhaps because we live in a nice area, have our own gardens, have friends around us who have checked to ensure we are OK, are relatively unaffected financially
- Or perhaps we are not feeling quite so blessed: are we, or some of our family and friends, among those
 - who have lost their livelihoods, or live daily with the fear of losing it
 - who live alone,
 - who have had vital medical treatment postponed,
 - who have become more confused,
 - who are feeling isolated,
 - who have had COVID and are still suffering its lingering effects
 - the list of those that are bereft of blessings goes on and on

- There is no doubt that blessings are not fairly distributed in this world – I don't know how you feel about what support there should be for those that have lost their jobs or their businesses in this current crisis, or whether children who get free school lunches should continue to get them over school holidays – but here in today's gospel reading Jesus makes it pretty clear what he thinks!
- As Jesus describes in this passage how he sees people, the world as we know it is turned on its head
 - Those who look unfortunate and unimportant are assured their time is coming
- This is very much in keeping with other things that Jesus says
 - He who is first shall be last
 - It is harder for a rich man to get into heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle
 - The story of the widow's mite – worth more to him than all the riches of the wealthy
- So, what are we who are comfortable, to do now then?
- Imagine a community where people are not living in enlightened self interest, balanced by the occasional bit of charity, but instead are living in a world where people are judged according to their need
- Where the neediest are the most important and their wellbeing is the focus of the whole community
- Where the most obnoxious and least lovable people are the ones who must be loved because they need it most
- Do the marginalised, the lonely and the needy find their needs met in our churches, and in us as individuals?
- Jesus reminds us in our reading that the poor and the hungry and the weeping will be blessed.
- The reading focuses on attitudes, on how our hearts should be towards God and our neighbour
- We are reminded that we should love those who hate us, bless those who curse us, pray for those who abuse us, give to those who take from us and so on
- And a Saint is someone who has done this, who works to bring God's love and the message of God's love to other people during their lives here on earth.
- They do not have to be always brave, or attractive, or rich, or clever – they do not have to succeed all of the time – they just have to keep trying.
- The reading from the letter of John tells us that we are God's children now – truly blessed
- Let us be generous in sharing our blessings, and on persevering in living in the most caring and generous way we can
- At the moment the whole world needs heroes – together – in our own small way - we can change lives!
- Amen

Prayers

We give thanks this morning for all those, who by their actions or by the inspiration of their lives, have changed the lives of others for good.

We pray for those health and care workers who are in the front line of the fight against this pandemic and for all those in positions of leadership across the world, government ministers, ministers of all faiths, leaders of industry and commerce, those who manage social services and education systems

We pray too for those who work to meet the needs of society – in government, in health, in education, in research, in food provision and distribution, in manufacturing, in hospitality and entertainment and in all other areas of life

And as we remember Gods promise in Isaiah to be with us in the waters and not be overwhelmed, we pray today for those who are indeed overwhelmed – the sick and the frail and those afraid they will not receive the care they need, the unemployed and those in fear of losing their livelihoods, the lonely and all those who fear isolation, the anxious and those who are confused, people in Turkey and Greece in the aftermath of the earthquake there, those who go without the basic necessities of live or who live in constant fear or pain

We remember before you those we have loved but see no longer, for all those who are now in the fullness of your peace

Amen