

Reflection at St Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark, Victoria – 5th November, 2017 Rev. Ron Gordon

All Saints

(It may be helpful to readers to have a copy of both the Bible and the hymn-book, “Together in Song”, at hand – Franklyn)

INTRODUCTION

The Uniting Church uses the series of Bible readings from the Revised Common Lectionary. We have four readings each Sunday.

- **On high and holy Days, like Lent, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints, Christ the King. Christmas the readings are closely related to the main theme of the day.**
- **It can be worth looking at all four readings and what they are telling us and that is what we will be doing this morning when we are celebrating “All Saints”.**
- **We begin with a reading we don't often hear, from the Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine.:**

1. We read from “The Book of Revelation”, Chapter 7, verses 9 to 17

In 1962 D.T. Niles published his book on a study of the Book of the Revelation – ‘As Seeing the Invisible’ in which he tried to make the book more accessible to modern men and women. It is still a help in our journey with John of Patmos, working in the quarry by day, and writing visions in his spare time. It is worth salvaging if you come across it. This is part of our reading this a.m.:

“After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all the tribes and people and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out with a loud voice, saying,

Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!

There is colour, a lot of red, to do with blood, there is the noise of singing and blessing and hallelujah! And everyone is there – a numberless multitude – All the Saints! And it should be noted that John includes the Old Israel – 144,000 of them! but the bulk of the saints are Gentiles.

There is no escape from the fact that his visions are filled with death and destruction – people have used his term ‘Apocalypse’ to describe human war activity like in the bombing in Vietnam, and the threat of North Korea.

But this was not human activity – it is for John the outworking of God’s judgement on human evil, as John could see and hear it. It is thought that he may have expected further persecution by Rome from what he had experienced.

It is not easy reading as the writing sometimes seems to be in code: there are trumpets blasting, scrolls being opened and sentence passed. White Horse, Red Horse.

After the horror and destruction towards the end of his writing, John turns over a new page which brings hope to his contemporary Christians and to us 2000 years later. In Chapter 21 he writes: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...and I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. See the home of God is amongst mortals. He will dwell with them as their God. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them: he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

2. We read Psalm 34, verses 1 to 10, and verse 22

The little prefix to this Psalm says this was of David and he feared when he was taking refuge that he might be betrayed so he feigned madness so that they drove him out. If that is so the verses we read today are remarkably light and encouraging.

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.... O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

In our world today we have enough to be afraid of with people making threats, and allies we have trusted for years we wonder about what they might be saying. We have domestic worries about power and heat and how we will get through summer together, not to mention money and how we use it.

Yet here David- and most of the reliable commentators seem to think it right to attribute the Psalter to David – and here he says to us: Look to him (The Lord) and be radiant: so your faces shall never be ashamed. Is it possible in the midst of troubles to be radiant? I think it has always been a Christian characteristic. It is possible to be radiant because the Lord enlightens us and we reflect the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of

God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And David didn't know that, but he knew the Lord.

This Psalm is such a good one for this day because it reflects so clearly the life and wisdom of the saints of old who clung so faithfully to God and his word and his promise.

O taste and see that the Lord is good: happy are those who take refuge in him. The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

We sing Hymn from "Together in Song", No.112 "Through all the changing scenes of life"

3. We read from "The Epistle of John, Chapter 3, verses 1 to 3

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God and that is what we are. The reason the world did not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is that: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope purify themselves just as he is pure."

What does this tell us about the saints?

What it says is that 'saints' is not about the past – it is about the here and now, you and me – we are the children of God, it is what God calls us, and that is what matters. It speaks of us now, and for the future. Don't get lost in imagining "haloes", for it points us to what we were thinking about John and his book written on Patmos.

'Children of God' because God's love has been shown to them and they in turn respond with love to God and others; believers love one another for God's love is the starter – and solidarity not simply with our contemporary Christians but also with they who preceded and those who will follow us.

The reason why the world does not know us (the Church) is that it did not know God. The truth about the Gospel is that in every time and place, there are those who adopt the values and perceptions of the world and are not able to recognize God and God's children. Humanity is alienated from God.

The future of God's Children?

Christians of all times and places have a common future: *"Beloved we are God's children now; what we shall be he has not yet revealed. What we know*

is that when he (God) is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” That is the hope of All the Saints!

We sing from “Together in Song”, No.455 - *For all the saints* – verses1-4

4. We read from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Chapter 5, verses 1 to 12 “Blessed are....

The saints are those who are truly blessed, and we read of them in the Sermon on the Mount. But what sort of people are they? Firstly they are “Blessed” and we know that word goes back to a Greek word Makarios. William Barclay wrote of it as “a joy untouchable, beyond all the chances and changes of life.”

The early Greeks saved it for their gods, being the truly blessed ones. It means much more than ‘happy’ – happiness depends so much on mood swings and we talk of a ‘happy hour’, ‘happy talk’ and happy days are here again.

The question is who will be blessed with divine joy, and the answer comes back, and they are not the people we would expect: the poor in spirit, or as Luke tells us, the ‘poor’, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven – the dispossessed become the possessors; Is that good news for the great Christian leaders, like Mr Putin or Mr Trump? We know they are Christian because they have told us, and sometimes we see they go to church. (And so we should pray for them). Jesus was not FOR the important people as such, but for the little and the lost and the lonely, for sinners.

On *All Saints Day* we remember those who mourn, and it is us, for we will be comforted. Many of us have memories of people we have known and loved and who are now in that company – people who have helped us find meaning and purpose in life and blessed us on our way. Remembering may hurt, but Christ stands with us as true Brother and Friend, offering his comfort. Blessed are those who mourn.

Do we believe that the meek will inherit the earth? – I think of all the meek refugees carrying their bedding across rivers and seas and I pray they will find a place on earth, because I have a place to lie down and a kitchen in which to cook and eat – why on earth shouldn’t they? My Lord asks that question, but so many powerful people do not hear him for they are listening to themselves.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled, because they are looking for God's righteousness which puts evil back in its place, and establishes justice and right dealings between people.

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.

All that raises questions – does this mean the community of Christ, or is it really modelled on Christ himself? I think the answer to both questions is “yes”: it is a kind of pattern or vision for the life of his people which he stands behind himself.

We will find when we have confidence in God, that underneath the surface of life there is great peace and great joy because God will always be there for us: not to extract us from situations, but to suffer with us and for us – in the process, we find that we may hold to God weakly and shakily, but that God holds us in a grip which will not let us be torn from God's grasp.

This treasure, Christ gives to all the children of God, all the saints, to journey on with the guidance of the Spirit; and finally to know the sheer unadulterated joy in the blessing God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen