

Theme **ALL SAINTS DAY**
the feast of all the redeemed
– **KNOWN and UNKNOWN** –
who are now believed to be in heaven!

A good focus after darkness of Halloween – imported from USA!

Call to worship Ps 34 vs 1 – 3

I will extol the LORD at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.
I will glory in the LORD;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
Glorify the LORD with me;
let us exalt his name together.

Hymn StF 51 Great is thy faithfulness

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee ;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not ;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be :
Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness !
Morning by morning new mercies I see ;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love :

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide ;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside !

Thomas O. Chisholm (1866–1960)

Gathering Prayer

Reading Isaiah 40: 27 – 31 NRSV

Why do you complain, Jacob?
Why do you say, Israel,
"My way is hidden from the LORD;
my cause is disregarded by my God"?
²⁸ Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Sermon Part 1. KNOWN SAINTS

All Saints Day has an Eastern origin - at first commemorating the martyrs of the 'whole world' (as they knew it) and as witnessed by Ephrem of Syria and John Chrysostom: -
But later it was commemorating all the saints - not only martyrs!

Who were Ephrem and John?

Ephrem of Syria was born 306AD in Nisibis, Mesopotamia, part of Iraq today. Baptised, he joined the cathedral school, and later became the Head. But after the Persians captured Nisibis, when he was about 45yrs old, he became a Monk - a newish idea then - and lived in a cave where he wrote works explaining and interpreting Christianity, and he also wrote hymns.

In 372, Ephrem organised charity for the victims of famine but sadly died in his cave soon after. Pope Benedict XV in 1920 gave Ephrem the title Doctor of the Church, for his Christian writings

We know more about **John Chrysostom**,

John was born when Ephrem was 40yrs – so they only slightly overlapped. John Chrysostom was the son of an army officer at Antioch, (also in Syria, near the Mediterranean) and was brought up by his widowed mother. He received the best education which Antioch could offer and he, too, became a Monk in 373 – the year Ephrem died, and lived in a Community not far from the city for 8 years.

On return to Antioch, he became a deacon until he was ordained as Priest in 386. Later he became the Bishop's special assistant, with particular charge for the temporal (*worldly*) and spiritual care of the numerous poor. Antioch was where St Paul had worked for a while, and John Chrysostom became famous as a preacher and a commentator on Paul's letters, plus the gospels of Matthew and John.

In 398 John was consecrated Archbishop of Constantinople – later to become the centre of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, as opposed to Rome as the centre of Western Christianity.

John Chrysostom sounds not unlike the current Pope Francis!

He began by deciding to make a difference!

- He started to reform the corrupt morals of the court, the clergy, and the people.
- He reduced the usual spending of the Archbishop's household in favour of the poor and the hospitals.
- He attacked the behaviour, the clothes and the make-up of women at court,
- and berated the fact that many Christians had been to the races on Good Friday, and to games in the Stadium on Easter Saturday!!

The Empress chose to see much of John's attacks as **against her** so set about getting him exiled - which she did manage to do.

But then an earthquake terrified the Empress. so John was recalled! He resumed his moral plan and was banished, **again** in 404A.D. even though his own people, and the Pope, and many bishops all supported him. Just 3 years later he died. 31 years later his body was taken back to Constantinople to rebury in the church of the Apostles

These two men were key martyrs, among others, for a Feast Day.

Christianity probably came to the British Isles via the Romans in the 2nd Century AD and *Celtic Christianity* really flourished here roughly from 400 AD (not long after the books of our Bible were agreed!) and flourished for 600years plus, until the Normans invasion. It was in the reign of Pope Gregory, around 740AD, that a chapel was dedicated at St Peter's in Rome **to all the saints**, and Egberg of York, brought **the Feast of All Saints** back to England, and added it to the feast of St Bede on Nov 1st.

At this time, Celtic faith and lifestyle was non-hierarchical, and decentralised. It had a great sense of the sacredness of places, the supernatural, and of life beyond death. Learning, and literary and musical culture, were important, with a great oral tradition of ballads and poems. It could not have been more different from the organised, urban, hierarchical and centralised faith of the Romans!

Celtic designs show endlessly intertwining and interlacing ribbons, which decorate high standing stone crosses, or illustrate pages of old manuscripts, and suggest the lack of any beginning or ending in the cycle of existence, but in Christian times it was used to illustrate **eternity, and God's everlasting love**. The design also expresses the principle of constant movement, suggesting a world, and a faith, which is in a state of continuous motion! Don't we realise that today, in 2020 AD?

Of our national saints, **St Patrick**, lived at this time and came originally from w. Britain but was captured by Irish pirates, and taken as a slave for 6 years. After being freed, he trained as a priest, and became Bishop of Ireland. His writings are the first literature of the British Church. He was concerned with abolishing paganism; and made no distinction between classes; remaining conscious of being an unlearned exile, former slave and fugitive, but who had learnt to trust completely in God.

St Columba, whom many Scots treat as a native, was actually born and grew up in N. Ireland but went east to Iona, off W Scotland as an exile, and from there in the 500s AD Christianity began to spread across the north of our land.

St David was a Monk and Bishop of the 6th century, a saint from Pembrokeshire, although there are few details about his life.

The word **Celtic** reminds us that the saints and scholars of 7th, 8th and 9th C Ireland, Scotland and Wales, were descendants of highly civilised and cultured people who had once dominated the whole of western and central Europe, but, were later eclipsed and pushed to the margins by the Romans and then the Germanic occupation.

British Christians lived under fear of persecution. Their stories of remarkable hope, simplicity of lifestyle, imagination and a wholeness of life, was what we are now beginning to see is much needed in today's society here.

Let's say together a responsive prayer of praise about the journey of faith - 'Lord we praise you –

Lord, we praise you - from '**In Unexpected Places**'
by Tony Jasper & Myra Blyth

Lord we praise you for your people who set out on a journey,
The journey of faith which began in your Son.
We sing as we join them and travel together,
As ages and cultures are merged into one.

**We all join to sing the praises of Jesus,
We all bring our gifts to honour his name.**

Lord, we praise you for martyrs who died on the journey.
They laid down their lives to honour your name.
From their scattered seeds your World Church has ripened,
And kingdoms and countries were won in your name.

**We all join to sing the praises of Jesus,
We all bring our gifts to honour his name.**

Lord, we praise you for guides who mapped out the journey,
Translators and teachers who taught us your way.
Your stories are told as we travel together,
Your love is proclaimed in the tongue of the day.

**We all join to sing the praises of Jesus,
We all bring our gifts to honour his name**

Lord, we praise you for prophets who lead on the journey,
Your words they have spoken, your power they proclaim.
In their voices you challenge the forces of evil,
And through them the nations have learnt of your name.

**We all join to sing the praises of Jesus,
We all bring our gifts to honour his name.**

Lord, we praise you for the calling to be on the journey,
The journey of faith which begins with your Son.
With the martyrs and prophets and teachers we travel.
In the steps of the saints we are travelling on.

**We all join to sing the praises of Jesus,
We all bring our gifts to honour your Son.**

*Words by David Hill.
From the Musical 'Crows and Methodists.'*

Hymn Stf 394 Spirit of God unseen as the wind

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.*

You spoke to us long, long ago,
gave us the written word ;

we read it still, needing its truth,
through it God's voice is heard.

Without your help we fail our Lord,
we cannot live his way ;
we need your power, we need your strength,
following Christ each day.

Margaret V. Old (1932–2001)

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Reading Matt 5; 1 – 12 NRSV

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them. He said:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Sermon part 2

I've named famous saints, and you have heard of any more,
but I'm sure we can each think of Christians whom we term 'a saint'

UNKNOWN SAINTS.

Saints are not only those who are **Beatified** – that is 'declared by a Pope that a person is blessed in heaven.' St Peter, St Teresa etc
We can see there a connection between the words **Beatified** and **The Beatitudes** – the title of our Matthew reading set for today.
Who are those to be blessed, with unexplainable happiness?

The Message Version of the Bible was written by someone who was a teacher of Hebrew and Greek in a theological college, but then was surprised to be called by God to become a pastor/ minister of a congregation, so his work comes out of 40 years of pastoral work.

Message version of Matt 5.

'You're blessed when you are at the end of your rope.

With less of you, there is more of God and his rule.

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you

Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

You're blessed when you are content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God.

He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

You're blessed when you care.

At the moment of being care-full, you'll find yourselves cared for.

You're blessed when you get your inside-world, your mind and heart, right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead

of compete or fight. That's when you'll discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.

The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

Not only that – count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me.

What that means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable.

You can be glad when that happens – give a cheer, even!

– for though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds.

And know that you are in good company.

My prophets and witnesses have always got into this kind of trouble.'

Words to ponder further!

Paul, when writing to new Christians in Philippi & in Colossus addressed the letters "To all the saints"

'saints' as used in the translations of the NT, doesn't mean notable, famous, special folk. Neither does it infer holiness, but rather being consecrated – that is given to God.

Dedicated folk who live for God, and his way, - as seen in Jesus

Does someone come to your mind when I say those words?

During lockdown and sorting out an attaché case labelled 'Margaret – Sentimental' I found this little book – 5" x 3" called Morning Bells, daily Bible readings. It was given to me as a member of the Methodist Church in Handsworth, Birmingham by my Class Leader as I was about to go away from home to Southlands College in Wimbledon. Mrs Long (as we called her in those days, although named Lilian) was a lovely lady, so caring, and gracious, and calm, and very interested in us youngsters. But I didn't know the half of what she did and meant to people, until she died only 6 years later, aged 54. Apparently she'd had years of health problems begun when teaching in India, but about which she kept very quiet. So many people had been blessed by her. For me she seemed saintly, so I'll keep the little book.

My parents were very active at church and in the community. Many a time my sister or I were told to go and do an errand for someone, or

take a meal to somebody. In the said suitcase I also found some letters sent to my Mum in 1990 - on the death of my father (30 years ago this month!)

So many people mentioned Dad's Christian principles, and his wonderful faith, even in his last 8 years of frustrating limitations with communication or movement after a major stroke.

I wear this white poppy as well as a red poppy because Dad was a Conscientious Objector in WW2, going to court and quoting that Jesus told Peter to put his sword away. A white poppy is pro peace.

'All saints day' can encompass everyone we can think of who has in some way shown us Jesus, and more of God's ways for life in this world.

And doesn't our world need to become a better place?

We need to look to the needs of others even before our own, lift up the lowly, feed the hungry, and be the only Bible that many people will ever see.

So, in the words from the Methodist Worship Book, used at funerals

We praise God for the great company of the faithful
whom Christ has brought through death,
to behold your face in glory,
and who join with us in worship, prayer and service. **AMEN,**

Prayers of Intercession

We end with singing **another Hymn – For all the saints StF 746**
But modern words from Iona Community, set to a traditional folk tune .

Hymn for All Saints Day in Singing the Faith 746

Sung to the traditional folk melody – O Waly Waly

For all the saints who showed your love
in how they lived and where they moved,

for mindful women, caring men,
accept our gratitude again.

For all the saints who loved your name,
whose faith increased the Saviour's fame,
who sang your songs and shared your word,
accept our gratitude, good Lord.

For all the saints who named your will,
and saw your kingdom coming still
through selfless protest, prayer and praise,
accept the gratitude we raise.

Bless all whose will or name or love
reflects the grace of heaven above.
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,
your life through theirs has hallowed ours.

*John L Bell (b.1949)
and Graham Maule (b.1958)
Wild Goose Resources, Iona Community*

Benediction