

All Saints Day 2019

Luke 6: 20-36

Having come to the end of our series on Christian values and what it means to be a Christian, with John summing it all up for us so wonderfully last Sunday - his sermon is on the website if you missed it. It is appropriate that today we celebrate All Saints. All Saints Day was of course on November 1st and we mark it on the nearest Sunday. The celebration of all the Saints that have gone before us, that great cloud of witnesses, as they are described in Hebrews, is a tradition that goes back to the early Church. It is good to remember those Saints who have gone before us, it is good to think about and to follow their example in many cases. But today is a celebration of All Saints and in case you missed it when we have said it before, that means you and I. Forgiven sinners are Saints, we are citizens of heaven every bit as much as those who have died. We don't become citizens of heaven when we die, we became citizens of heaven, children of God, when we believed, when we decided to follow Jesus and when our sins were forgiven.

In our reading in Luke, Jesus is teaching again, very much like when He taught the sermon on the mount, about how our values and the way we live our lives is different to those in the world. Being topical, it is really His manifesto for the Christian life. And like John said last week, it is a looking glass Kingdom. In this world thinking often tends towards meritocracy. People should get what they deserve. Some people talk about Karma, which comes from deeply unchristian eastern philosophy. What goes around should come around. Good people should get good things and the universe should somehow ensure that bad people get what is coming to them, get their comeuppance. That is only right, surely, that makes sense, it is fair. Well to start with you might almost think that is what Jesus is saying. Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who mourn, you will be filled and comforted. But woe to the rich for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, you will be hungry. Jesus is for sure promising that although we may suffer in this life (and everyone does go through suffering) there will be

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ultimate fulfilment and joy in heaven. And the rich do have a problem if all they want is to be rich. If they are only interested in storing up treasure here then there will be nothing for them in heaven. I read in the paper yesterday that many millionaires and billionaires are looking for ways to move their money out of this country quickly if the result of the election means that taxes will go up. They already have more money than they could ever need or can even spend but they don't want to have to give any of it away to help others in any way. Why would they want to support the NHS for example when they have private health care? I am reminded of the man in the parable who built a bigger barn for all his wealth and God took his life that very night. It is interesting that poor people are often more generous than the rich, sharing what little they have. That is of course a generalisation. There are plenty of rich people who delight in being generous and helping others. I don't think Jesus was talking about them. And when it comes to people getting what they deserve, He has this to say - love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and of course the Golden Rule, do to others as you would have them do to you. Even sinners love people who love them - we are called to be different. If we love our enemies, do good and expect nothing in return we will be children of the most High. For He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. He is merciful and He expects us to be merciful too. This is why it is called a narrow path - it isn't easy to walk. Some days I even get angry with people who are ungrateful when I hold a door open for them. If they don't say thank you, I have been known to say loudly, in my best passive aggressive voice, "you're welcome"! Not exactly gracious, but I am learning. We should do things for others and not even expect a thank you.

I came across this interesting quote the other day.

The Roman Emperor Julian, writing in the fourth century, regretted the progress of Christianity because it pulled people away from the Roman

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gods. They called Christians Atheists because they didn't worship the Roman Gods. He said, 'Atheism [i.e. the Christian faith!] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.

Those 4th century Christians were making such an incredible impact on the world, that even the emperor himself had noticed. And how? Just by loving service and looking after the poor. It is all we are called to do, love God and love others. Do all the things we have been talking about. I know I have quoted this from Mother Theresa before, but it is so relevant here.

People are often unreasonable, illogical and self centered;

Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;

Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies;

Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;

Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;

Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;

Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;

Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough;

Give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and your God;

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It was never between you and them anyway.

And going back to those beatitudes, the list of blessings, I would like to offer a modern translation of them that I find helpful. It is from a website called Going for Growth.

Blessed are the saints who trust God's power and loving care,
for they are part of the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the saints when they are sad because the world is so unfair,
They have God's promise that justice will come.

Blessed are the nobodies who know they are nobodies and still do God's
work.

In God's world they are the leaders.

Blessed are the saints whose greatest wish is to do what God desires.
God will give them what they want.

Blessed are the saints who treat other people gently,
God will treat them gently.

Blessed are those who get in trouble when they do what God requires,
For they are surely among God's saints.