

## Sermon for Sunday 6 November – All Saints

Lord Jesus, you came down from the mountain to teach us and heal us from our sin. Open our eyes to your truth, and ready us to do your will. Amen.

Blessed are you. The first words of the Beatitudes. Well known words, and still challenging. We find them both in the Gospel according to Luke and the Gospel according to Matthew.

In Matthew, Jesus stands on top of a mountain when he says these words. In Luke, he is coming down from the mountain where he has been praying, to stand on a level place. Similarly, Matthew puts Jesus on a mountain in Galilee to give his last charge to the disciples; Luke has him appearing in a room in Jerusalem where the disciples have gathered. Sermon on the Mount or Sermon on the Plain? Great Commission or presence in the breaking of bread? Which will it be? The elevated Jesus? Or the Jesus among us?

It is all a matter of perspective. Imagine looking up at Jesus, above us, like Moses on a mountain top between earth and heaven. The Beatitudes then appear as a higher law, a covenant made with a community to which we aspire to belong.

But now imagine looking at Jesus on our level. Jesus is looking up at us because he has been kneeling down to touch someone sick or lame. The Beatitudes now appear to be immediate. They are part of our everyday life, they are inseparable from the joys and sufferings of life. In Luke, the blessed are just plain poor and hungry. We cannot look past them to see something loftier: Jesus is blocking our view.

In Luke, Jesus is looking up at us, as if to say, what are you doing right now? I could use some help. Look at all these people, they're sick and dying, they're tormented by spirits. They have come from all over the land, from the coast to the river, from south to north. Will you get down here with me and help?

Luke makes clear that the Beatitudes are not about righteousness in general. They are not about our aspirations to godliness. They are about a community of disciples standing with the grieving, the poor, and the hungry of the land, as Jesus does. They are about practicing the presence of Jesus through acts of care and compassion. Luke insists that the Christian life begins with ministry, not with belief. Even if you don't believe, even if you're full of doubt, you can follow Jesus, you can follow him into the crowd of people who need solace, comfort, help.

In Luke we are called to learn Christ's way by doing. Look at the end of our passage today, it's full of action verbs from Jesus: Love, do good, bless, pray, give. These are specific actions that the best of us are incapable of doing fully, even on our most charitable days. Jesus says: 'Do to others what you would have them do to you'. With these words, he is not describing what is, but what should be.

It is a radical ethic, to love our enemy, to love the stranger, to love the apparently unlovable. It means to live and act in the hope that their life will come to reflect the goodness that God wants for all people. And that we cannot do on our own. We need the strength of Jesus. It is his armour we put on, his belt of truth, his breastplate of righteousness, his shield of faith, his helmet of salvation, his sword, his Word.

Like all the Saints who worked in Christ and for Christ, we too need the full armour of God. We need it in order to stand our ground in the face of our arch enemies, which are poverty and injustice, rejection and evil.

The letter to the Ephesians makes it very clear. As God's people, we are to stand in the peace of the gospel and the determination of Christ, against unjust rulers, against unfair authorities who do not do enough to protect the vulnerable, the environment, our children's future. We are to resist evil, which is the corporate sin of greed, the temptation to turn a blind eye when we see something very wrong happening. That is the way of Christ.

The truth of the Beatitudes, the righteousness of Jesus, the peace of the gospel, the faith of the disciples, the salvation offered by God and the reassurance of God's love, all of this is given to us. It is freely given so that we may walk in the footsteps of all the Saints, all those who came before us and worked like Jesus for more justice and equality.

Because we are not only a living continuation of all our ancestors but also of all the saints. In a few minutes, we will affirm our faith. Now in the Apostles' Creed, Christians made a late addition to this ancient prayer. They added the sentence: 'I believe in the communion of saints'. They were offering us the idea that the dead are at one with the living, whether they're our direct ancestors or the saints in glory. Today, you walked up and down the aisle to find your seat. Imagine the thousands of people who have walked here before you, some daily, some occasionally, but always bringing with them their life stories, moments shared together between humanity and God. The whole thing, all of life, is one, and all of it is entirely loved by God. Within this worldview, we are part of the body, we are humble links in the great chain of history.

And the full armour of God is a reflection of our true identity as children of God. We all belong to God, and it is as children of God that we are sent into the world to offer a caring hand to the poor, and live out the Beatitudes.

So blessed are we if we accept this identity, blessed are we if we put on the armour of God and agree to be led by the Lord of truth. Blessed are we when we do God's work. Because when we stand with those who need our help, we have a chance to see Jesus.

Amen.

Intercessions:

**Lord in your spirit of truth;**

*keep us ready to do your will*