

## A service for 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2022 (StF) All Saints

### Call to worship: Psalm 149

Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honour and sing for joy on their beds.

May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints.

Praise the LORD. Amen.

*The acclaimed 'Father of English Hymnody', Isaac Watts was the son of a schoolmaster, and was born in Southampton, July 17, 1674. He was a precocious student, studying Latin when only four and writing good poems when he was only seven. As his family were Dissenters, he could not go to university, but studied at the Academy of Revd. Thomas Rowe, an Independent minister. In 1702 he became pastor of the Independent Church, Berry St., London and in 1712, he accepted an invitation to visit Sir Thomas Abney, at his residence of Abney Park, and at Sir Thomas' pressing request, made it his home for the remainder of his life. We shall sing, 'Come, let us join our cheerful songs'.*

**1 Come, let us join our cheerful songs  
with angels round the throne;  
ten thousand thousand are their tongues,  
but all their joys are one.**

**2 'Worthy the Lamb that died,' they cry,  
'to be exalted thus!;  
'Worthy the Lamb!' our lips reply,  
'for he was slain for us.'**

**3 Jesus is worthy to receive  
honour and power divine;  
and blessings, more than we can give,  
be, Lord, for ever thine.**

**4 Let all creation join in one  
to bless the sacred name  
of him that sits upon the throne,  
and to adore the Lamb.**

*Isaac Watts (1674 – 1748)*

### **Let us pray.**

Sovereign God, in the power of your holy Word you created the universe and everything that lives within it; in the warmth of your compassion you sustain all life and in your boundless grace you offer salvation through your Son, Jesus Christ. Throughout human history, despite our sinfulness, you have tried to draw us close to you, first through the prophets and patriarchs, then, after we rebelled against you and made ourselves your

enemies, you revealed your amazing love by your Only Son, Jesus Christ. Through his life, death and resurrection he broke the power of sin and death, offering us eternal life through faith in him. May we, therefore, pray to you in faith, sing our hymns joyfully, them both hear and respond to your holy word.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the many blessings we receive from you: for the beautiful world in its autumnal glory, for the good things we enjoy; for experiences and opportunities that have fulfilled us and for saints we remember today: people who have cared for, guided and inspired us, besides building your kingdom here on earth. Above all else, thank you for Jesus, without whom we are helpless and hopeless.

Merciful God, although Jesus showed us how we should live as you call us to, we confess that we still don't always love and serve you wholeheartedly; nor do we love other people as we love ourselves. We say and do things that upset, or hurt other people and grieve you. Moreover, sometimes we don't help neighbours who are in need, or trouble when we know we really ought to. Gracious God, we are truly sorry and turn away from our sins, asking you to forgive us for the sake of your Jesus Christ our Lord.

Loving Lord, we believe you hear and answer our prayers and in your grace you proclaim that our sins have been forgiven. Therefore, Lord, help us to serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and warm-heartedly from now onwards, in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen.

***We shall say the Lord's Prayer***

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

*The author of our next hymn was written by Bishop William Walsham How in 1864. Whist he was Bishop of Bedford (which actually meant he served in the East End of London) he travelled by horse-drawn buses, rather than in his bishop's carriage and was nicknamed 'The omnibus Bishop', but he was also known as 'The Children's Bishop', which delighted him more, for he founded a children's home and always tried to set youngsters at their ease. Once, when a group of young children was assembled to meet him, he helped reduce their fears by reciting, 'Humpty Dumpty' with them. Let us sing, 'For all the saints who from their labours rest'.*

- 1. For all the saints who from their labours rest,  
Who thee by faith before the world confessed,  
Thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blest: Alleluia, alleluia!**
- 2. Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might;  
Thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;  
Thou in the darkness still their one true light: Alleluia, alleluia!**
- 3. O may thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,  
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,  
And win, with them, the victor's crown of gold! Alleluia, alleluia!**

**4. O blest communion, fellowship divine!**

**We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;**

**Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine: Alleluia, alleluia!**

**5. And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,**

**Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,**

**And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong: Alleluia, alleluia!**

**6. The golden evening brightens in the west;**

**Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest;**

**Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest: Alleluia, alleluia!**

**7. But lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day;**

**The saints triumphant rise in bright array;**

**The King of Glory passes on his way! Alleluia, alleluia!**

**8. From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,**

**Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,**

**Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost: Alleluia, alleluia!**

© *William Walsham How (1823 – 1897)*

***We shall now bring our concerns for the world to our Lord.***

Lord, you have given us a beautiful, self-sustaining planet upon which to live, but our hearts sink when we see so much suffering around us, much of which is the result of human greed, pride, foolishness and indifference. Where we are able to serve you, use us as your earthly hands. Grant us the compassion, courage, wisdom and steadfastness to be effective, but where we can't bring about the changes the world requires, we ask you to prompt and warm the hearts of people who have the power, skill and influence to intervene, for all things are possible to you.

Gracious God, news reports of conflicts between Palestinians and Jews in Jerusalem, civil strife in Iran and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia with threats of escalation into nuclear exchanges make us all anxious for the future of mankind. As Prince of peace, hear our prayer for an end to wars and strife which mar so many countries around the world, bringing destruction, death, injury and displacement. Warm and mould the hearts of the leaders of all nations and guide them in the ways of justice and mercy through which lasting peace can be achieved.

Generous God, we pray for the victims of floods in Pakistan and of recent hurricanes in Haiti, Cuba and Florida, that they may receive speedy help. We remember, too, our neighbours in countries facing severe famines like Afghanistan and those in the horn of Africa, where droughts and conflict have exacerbated the situation. We ask a blessing on organizations like the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can and Christian Aid which are working to provide them with desperately-needed aid. May they succeed in bringing relief to those needy lands.

We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy and rise in inflation increases to record levels and we thank you for food banks and for other organisations which are helping the poor. Despite the dire economic situation, may the Government and other agencies, including the Church find ways of helping people who are facing the awful choice of heating their homes, or eating to manage during the coming winter.

Lord of shalom, of healing and wellbeing, we offer our prayer for neighbours who are ill, or in any kind of need or trouble, for people who are living with anxiety or depression, or those whose relationships have broken down but, particularly, all who mourn the loss of somebody dear and find it difficult to come to terms with their grief. In a time of quiet reflection, we offer names of those for whom we are particularly concerned – confident that, as we name them in our hearts, you will know and meet their needs. .... Heavenly Father, help us to support them in whatever way we can, but embrace them all with your love, so they may be healed, comforted, given hope, encouraged and blessed with enduring peace.

Lord, we pray for our church, all churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church. As we emerge from the dark shadow of Coronavirus into a financial crisis, help us to renew and alter our ministries to our communities, so we can meet our neighbours' needs and offer not only healing but evidence of Christ's love for all-comers. May we have faith to bear the gospel light of hope and joy to our suffering, sin-darkened world. Abba, Father God, Bless us, our families and friends. Inspire us to keep Christ at the centre of our lives, so we share the abundance of your love in all we do and say, in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 6 verses 20 to 31**

Looking at his disciples, he said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you". Amen.

*The first two verses of our next hymn was written by Revd. John Keble, whose Assize sermon on national apostasy in 1833 resulted in the start of the Oxford Movement which led several Anglican priests to move to the Roman Catholic Church, including St. John Newman. Nevertheless, John Keble remained an Anglican. We shall sing, 'Blest are the pure in heart'.*

**1. Blest are the pure in heart,  
for they shall see their God;  
the secret of the Lord is theirs;  
their soul is Christ's abode.**

**2. The Lord, who left the heavens  
our life and peace to bring,**

to dwell on earth in lowliness,  
our pattern and our King;

3. Still to the lowly soul  
He does himself impart,  
and for his dwelling and his throne  
chooses the pure in heart.

4. Lord, we your presence seek,  
A vision of your face;  
give us a pure and lowly heart,  
a temple of your grace.

© John Keble (1792 – 1866) vs. 1 & 3 – William Hall vs. 2 & 4

**Sermon: “Beatitudes” Luke 6: 20 – 31**

The Oxford Dictionary defines saints as ‘**canonized or officially recognized by the church as having won by exceptional holiness a high place in heaven and veneration on earth**’. Some Christians pray to saints in particular situations, for example, my mother, an Anglican, would pray to **St. Jude** when she lost something – though actually he is the **patron saint of lost causes**. The United Kingdom has four patron saints: **Andrew, David, George and Patrick** and three years ago **Cardinal John Newman** became the first Briton to be canonised for a century. Some believe saints are perfect people, but essentially they are ordinary people who have been transformed by the Holy Spirit, which is why I am uncomfortable that to move from beatification to canonisation there has to be evidence of two miracles attributed to the person involved.

Fortunately, as a Non-Conformist, I prefer the use of ‘**saint**’ in the Old Testament and in Paul’s letters. In our call to worship the use of saints means God’s people, those who obey Torah and honour the covenant with the Lord. In our text from Isaiah, the prophet was encouraging Judeans in exile to remain faithful, despite the national humiliation they were enduring, despite the destruction of Jerusalem and the sacking of the temple. He declared that the Lord hadn’t abandoned them, but would bring the faithful remnant of his covenant people back to Jerusalem and would reverse their fortunes. However, they must remain true to God and trust in him.

In Paul’s letters, ‘saints’ refer to members of the Christian communities, people who believed in Christ Jesus and obeyed his teachings. Some of them, including Paul, were indeed canonized by the Church, but the term is still applicable to all faithful Christians, for we are **sanctified by faith: we are God’s people, a ‘holy priesthood**’. Therefore, today, we remember and celebrate people who have made a positive impact on our lives, whether or not they have had any social status. Members of our families, friends, teachers, ministers, church members – all can be considered saints in this sense and Jesus described some saintly qualities in what we call the Beatitudes.

In Luke’s gospel, the Sermon on the Mount began with ‘The Beatitudes’, because of the use of “**Blessed**” at the beginning of each of the qualities of character to which Jesus refers. Unfortunately, ‘**Blessed**’ is a poor translation of the Greek ‘**Makarios**’, which is better rendered as ‘**happy**’, or better still, ‘**fortunate**’. **The Good News Bible uses ‘happy’, not in the sense of being cheerful, or content, but to be congratulated. So, what qualities does Christ advocate and declare those who possess them fortunate?** If you look at them by society’s standards, they may seem absurd, because there is no mention of celebrity, fame, wealth, power over others, nor pre-eminence in

public gatherings. Instead, Jesus tells us what really matters in the attitudes of his followers – then and now.

Jesus copied the style of Old Testament poetical books to outline the qualities of true discipleship, where we accede to the demands of God's kingdom. Let us examine what Jesus regards as kingdom qualities: **'poor'** refers to those who know they are **'spiritually poor'**, people who humbly trust God, even though their loyalty can lead to their material disadvantage and possibly to oppression. Unlike the worldly, they do not use their talents for their own benefit, to gain wealth or power, which the world reveres, but instead they offer their gifts for the benefit of others. The kingdom of heaven consists of such men and women. **'Those who weep'** does not necessarily mean the bereaved, or penitent: they are people who are saddened by the state of the world, by their own failings and inability to set things right, so turn to the Lord in their distress. Jesus declares they will find inner peace through God's salvation.

Jesus ended the blessings by warning those who follow him that they might well face persecution and character assassination as a result, but called them to be strong, for he would face similar treatment and there was a long tradition that prophets had also suffered as a result of being true to God. **'Those who are hated, excluded from employment, families and society insulted and rejected as evil, because of the Son of Man'** recognizes the cost of following Christ. At the time the Church was born, followers were persecuted – don't forget that Paul pleaded for aid to be sent to Christians in Jerusalem, whose families had disowned them, turned them out of their houses and taken away their livelihoods. Sadly, in many countries, especially in the Middle East, Christians are still persecuted and even killed. Five years ago, Brierley Hill Methodist Church fought to gain political asylum for an Iranian woman, **Masoomah Pirayandeh, Masi**, who was told by both her family and neighbours she would be killed if she stayed in that country after she became a Christian. It took two years for the Home Office to grant her asylum, during which time she was not allowed to work – she is a pharmacist – and was told by one official to go home and pretend she was no longer a Christian! The church supported her in every way and she has now made a life for herself in this country. **Masi and all like her are guaranteed a place in God's kingdom.**

Please note the woes are not intended as Christ's curse, but as **'how unfortunate are those'** and seem to have been addressed to Pharisees among the crowd. The rich have loved and put their faith in material possessions. Instead of relying on God, they felt self-sufficient and were far less likely to accept the Good News Christ was bringing. Similarly, **'those that are full'** means more than people who have enough food: it refers to all who are satisfied with their wealth, who don't consider giving to neighbours who are in need, who will lack the desire to seek either their own salvation by following Jesus, or to try to improve the lot of less fortunate people. **'Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep'**, is certainly not a rejection of laughter, for Jesus spoke against the killjoy attitude of many in the Jewish religious establishment. **Laughter** here means self-satisfaction, indifference to the plight of others and spiritual complacency. A time would come when they would see the error of their ways, but it would be too late. The final woe, **'when all men speak well of you'**, implies that they would have sacrificed deeply-held principles in order to court favour. Truth would be an early victim for those who sought popularity and the Old Testament records how true prophets like **Isaiah and Jeremiah** suffered for standing up for the truth.

We may well feel these qualities are beyond us and certainly it is difficult for us to possess all of them: yet Jesus demonstrated each in his earthly ministry: in Charles Wesley's words, '**He left his Father's throne above – / So free, so infinite his grace – / Emptied himself of all but love, / And bled for Adam's helpless race.**' Christ trusted his Father enough to face death on a cross to fulfil God's plan for our salvation; trusted that he would be raised and glorified. Jesus was humble, despite being the Son of God. He did not seek out the rich, powerful, establishment and self-satisfied, but instead reached out to the poor, sinful, diseased and foreigners and his dealings with them, even the enemy, offered healing and reconciliation to all-comers, marking Jesus as the greatest of peacemakers.

We may not be called to lay down our lives for the sake of justice and God's kingdom, but nevertheless, we should humbly work for the good of our neighbours as we answer Christ's call, so we, too, may qualify as saints in the Pauline sense. Amen.

*The authors of our closing hymn, John Bell and Graham Maule are members of the Iona Community and have written a number of striking and challenging hymns, usually set to old Scots ballads. This one is set to 'O waly, waly', which I hope you will recognize. We shall sing, 'For all the saints who showed your love,'*

**1. 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**

**2. 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.**

**3. 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.**

**4. 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.**

© J. Bell (b. 1949) & G. Maule (b. 1958)

### ***Benediction***

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and forever more. Amen.**