

St Columba's Church - Virtual Service - 1 November 2020

Welcome

Saint Peter, Saint Matthew, Saint Andrew, Saint George, Saint Patrick, Saint David, Saint John,
Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Martin of Tours,
Saint ... what's-his-name ... bother, it's gone!
Saint Margaret, Saint Mary, Saint Bridget, Saint Anne, Saint Rhoda and sweet Bernadette,
Saint Agnes, Saint Frances, Saint Sarah, Saint Joan, Saint ... thingamajay ... Oh, I forget.
But what about Danny who's everyone's mate, And Evelyn who washes the stair,
And Trevor who cares for the folk in the Home,

And Michael, and Barbara, and Claire
Who go out collecting for Oxfam each year, And ask for no praise or renown,
And Tracy who's fostered a whole host of kids, And Bob, the street-sweeper in town.
And all of the people whose names are not known, The quiet ones, the gentle, the shy,
Well out of the limelight, not seen in stained-glass, The ones who will quietly slip by
Unnoticed, unheralded, out of the gaze
Of publicity, seeking no praise,
Who live lives of sacrifice, service and love, And have done for all of their days?
Look out for the heroes that nobody knows, And saints all around us you'll see ...
And maybe one day you'll be noticed as well – Saint so-and-so ... Goodness! That's me!

From "Welcoming Each Wonder" ©Tom Gordon – www.ionabooks.com

Hymn: Great is Thy faithfulness (<https://youtu.be/dTKIqmdfHSk>)

Prayer (Prayers come from Church of Scotland: Weekly Worship)

Living God, this is a day of blessedness,
when we take the opportunity to come together, to the very House of God,
to give thanks for Your goodness and grace.
This is a day when we pause, to take note,
to see and know what's around us, and to give thanks for Your many blessings.
We are blessed with life, the living, breathing life which is Your gift to us.
We are blessed with creation, the beauty and wonder of which is beyond our
comprehension. We are blessed with love, the ability to give love,
and the joy of receiving it.
We are blessed with the Church, with the Community of God's Faithful People, with
whom we are bound and in which we have our place.

We are blessed with the Gospel, with the Salvation won for us by Your Son, Jesus Christ.
Living God, we are richly blessed, and so we pause and give thanks for Your goodness
and grace.
But above all and beyond all, in all and through all,
we are blessed by Your Love –

a challenging love;
a rebuking love;
a healing love;
an accepting love;
a forgiving love.

So we are blessed again when we can confess our fallings, and hear Your words of love, "Arise sinner, and sin no more." So, as Your cloak of blessedness is cast around us once again, may we be drawn closer to You in the warmth of Your Spirit.

As the light of Your blessedness shines upon us today, may we rise, wakeful and watchful, to share that blessedness with those around us.

As the peace of Your blessedness restores our very soul, may we rest in You, knowing our blessedness is deep and secure.

These prayers we bring You, in and through the name of Jesus Christ, in whose words we now pray:

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 debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
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.

Bible readings

Psalm 34: 1-10, 22

Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelek, who drove him away, and he left.

- 1 I will extol the Lord at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.
- 2 I will glory in the Lord;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.
- 3 Glorify the Lord with me;
let us exalt his name together.
- 4 I sought the Lord, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.
- 5 Those who look to him are radiant;
their faces are never covered with shame.
- 6 This poor man called, and the Lord heard him;

he saved him out of all his troubles.

7 The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him,
and he delivers them.

8 Taste and see that the Lord is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

9 Fear the Lord, you his holy people,
for those who fear him lack nothing.

10 The lions may grow weak and hungry,
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

22 The Lord will rescue his servants;
no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

Matthew 5: 1-12

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

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.

The Beatitudes

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.

Hymn: What a beautiful name (<https://youtu.be/nQWFzMvCfLE>)

Reflection

Okay, a little quiz for you to begin with. A group of sheep is obviously a flock of sheep and a group of cows is a herd, But what is a group of jellyfish? (a smack) A group of ravens (an

unkindness). Peacocks? (ostentation), Sharks? (shiver), Zebras? (a zeal), Seagulls (a pain in the neck)

Today is All Saints Day and the term for a group of Saints that we will use today is a "Communion of Saints", which I rather like and is as evocative as any of the above.

As a term it's been around for at least 1,700 years, And it's roots are in the words of Paul in the Bible. Romans 12:5 "5So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another." 1 Corinthians 6:7 "17But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him."

This idea that all of us, living and dead, have communion with Jesus is celebrated in the Apostles Creed that, certainly at St Columba's, we recite during baptisms:

"I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
Is how it starts and...
I believe in the communion of the saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Is how it ends

The other name for today is: All Hallows Day, Hence, All Hallows Eve or Halloween yesterday, Which I have gathered to be a big thing in Jersey, though much quieter this year.

All Saints Day was originally a day to remember all those who died for their Christian faith, But over the years it has evolved into a day when we honour and remember all the saints, those who - in death - have joined the Church Triumphant, Saints like Columba, of course, But also saints closer to our own homes.

Martin Luther, the Reformer, held that all Christians are, at the same time, both sinner and saints. sinners because of our rebellious nature, but saints because of salvation in Jesus. And so on All Saints how can we best keep celebrating our own Communion of the Saints?

Because on All Saints, it seems like the right Sunday to ask how we remember the Saints we have gone before us. This Communion of Saints. All the Saints. Those Saints all of us hearing or listening to this will know of, And those Saints only best known to us.

In his book; "A Need for Living", Tom Gordon writes that the concept of the Communion of Saints has become increasingly important to him. "It matters in [his] soul", he writes, "to carry with [him] the countless numbers of people who have touched [him] deeply through the years with their love, their insights and the value of their lives."

Tom recalls an image shared with him at a conference regarding the Prophets of the Old Testament. If I remember correctly, he says, these Prophets were deemed to be in communion with God – from whence came their prophecies – "so closely in communion that they somehow entered into the very dwelling place of God, into God's inner sanctum, and there communed with God and – here is the point – with the saints and prophets who had gone before'.

The second thing, Tom writes about, is this idea of a table, That in the inner part of our being, there is a table, big or small, and round that table sit people who matter to us, who influence us, a relationship with whom deeply affects your life. They may be alive or dead, they may be intimate contacts or people we have never met, they may be of greater or lesser importance. But because they matter to us, they are part of us, forever at one with us, they are round our table – and so they are for us our communion of saints.

So, consciously or sub-consciously, in specific or vague ways, sometimes without any particular knowledge that it is happening, We commune with them, We sit down round the table with them, Tom writes, "And, like the prophets of old, you carry away what you need, of insight and clarity, of direction and decision".

Everyone has a table, Tom says. Everyone has their saints. Everyone has their time of communion. Everyone is influenced. We are at one with them And when those who are living pass from this life, they still have their place at our table; their influence remains.

The question is therefore, 'Who are the people round our table?' Who matters? Who remains when death comes? This, Tom says, should make us look at the relationships which matter to us, and to do it now.

In addition, there is this further great encouragement. If we have people round our table, it is just possible – indeed probable – that there are people who have us sitting round their table along with their heroes and saints. And I hope that we might be an influence for someone, somewhere, which might continue after we die, unsaintly saint though we may feel, so that in life and death, my being, what we are and what we will continue to be, will go on being important.

And this brings us back to the Beatitudes read earlier. Last week we had a little bit of 1 Corinthians 13 - "Love does not envy, love does not boast..." - and again this week we have one the most beautiful, poetic and meaningful of New Testament passages:

- 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.

And when we think of this idea of The Table, does it not shine new light on those words: "4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."? In John 16:22, Jesus talks of the "joy which no-one can take from you."

This is the blessedness of being immersed in Jesus, and which all the forces – 'chances and changes – of the world cannot threaten'.

It resonates with George Matheson's hymn, "O Love that will not let me go:" O Joy, that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee: I trace the rainbow through the rain, And feel that promise is not vain, That morn shall tearless be.

Those people, our people, the saints who remain round our table, are good enough and important enough for us to keep wanting and needing to commune with them. Yes, indeed, the people – all those wonderful people – are good enough for us too!

I've shared a lot of Tom Gordon's thoughts today and I am going to finish with a poem he wrote regarding another encouragement on All Saints Day;

The people I've met with;
the folk that I've fought;
The ones that I've cared for;
and those that I've not;
The people who matter;
the ones I'd disown;
Pray tell me – but where have they gone?

They come along with you in memory's store,
They're part of your life
since they've come through your door;
Their influence stays with you, never to go;
They'll always be with you, you know.

What, even the bad ones I'm happy to shun;
And those that I've damaged,
who hate what I've done?
I want them to leave me, to let me alone;
Please tell me that they have all gone.

I'm sorry to tell you, but that's not the case;
The worst of encounters has not gone to waste.
You're moulded and shaped by experience; so
They'll always come with you, you know.

The people I've failed with; the folk who've done wrong;
The ones who've rejected me, laughed at my song?
You tell me they matter, whatever their tone?
You mean that they'll never be gone?

It's not just your saints who will shape you and mould Your character, purpose and future;
so hold
To the truth of the matter, and watch how you go
– You are what they've made you, you know.

Hymn: O Love that wilt not let me go (<https://youtu.be/nt69WDtYNLo>)

Heaven - From "With an Open Eye" © Tom Gordon – www.ionabooks.com

'Wot's heaven like?' Nathan asked. He was always asking about stuff, and sometimes he didn't wait for an answer. But this time, he wasn't running away.

'Wot's heaven like?' Nathan repeated, just in case his question hadn't actually been heard the first time.

'Why are you asking that?' I replied, because grown-ups are clever, you see, and it's always a good technique to answer a question with another question because it gives you time to think, and respond properly to Mr Questioning.

'Well, you said my Nana had gone to heaven. So, wot's heaven like, if Nana's there?' I suppose I could have answered his question with another question of my own.

But I couldn't think of one. And anyway, it didn't sound much like he was in the mood to be fobbed off.

'I suppose it's kind of nice,' was all I could say. Kind of feeble, really, I reckoned. But I hoped it might help.

'Nicer than here?' Nathan went on.

'I suppose,' I replied – sounding really feeble now.

'Nicer than our house?' he continued.

'I expect so,' the increasingly feeble-grown-up response. 'So, where is it then?' Nathan asked.

Feeble responses appeared to be no deterrent to Mr Questioning's current line of enquiry. So I reverted to type – again – reduced to answering a question with another question, trying desperately to negotiate time to think. 'What do you reckon?' I asked.

'Dunno,' Nathan shot back. Why did it not sound feeble when he was honest? 'Dunno ...' he repeated. Clearly, he wasn't finished with his answer. 'See, I was thinking about my Nana, right? And it's just that ... I don't want her to be in heaven, cause that must be far away, and if you don't know where it is and I can't find it anywhere, even though I've looked and looked and looked, I don't want my Nana to be in a place I can't find, like far

away, see? And if I knew where heaven was I could pop over and see how she was getting on, just like we did before she went away.

But I can't, 'cause I can't find heaven and you don't know either, eh? So I just think about my Nana, and there she is, OK?'

He paused ... The current line of enquiry appeared to be temporarily suspended.

'OK ... I suppose ...' I replied, feebly, not supposing anything was OK at all. 'So you can find your Nana when you think about her ...' I continued, feebly, reduced now to repeating what I'd just been told, because there wasn't a question to use to respond to a question, any more ... but I still needed time to think.

'Yeah. When I think about my Nana, she just feels close, eh?'

I was going to reply, but I really had nothing to say. Neither had Nathan, really, apart from a final contribution to our heaven-centred discussion.

'I suppose' he said, 'if my Nana and me are together when I think about my Nana, then I'm in heaven with her, eh? So heaven is ... when Nana is with me ...'

'Wot's heaven like?' I was still stuck with his original question. He was always asking about stuff, and sometimes he'd work out his own answer, that usually turned out to be helpful to me too - like this time.

And now he was running away.

Prayer for Others

God of all blessedness, we turn to You now with our prayers for others, seeking Your blessing on all for whom we pray. You tell us:

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

So we pray for those whose spirit fails them, that they might be strengthened in their faith; for those whose poverty is physical, that they might have an equal share in the fruits of Your kingdom; for those whose outlook on life is poor, that they might have a glimpse of hope and purpose.

You tell us: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

So we pray for all who are cast down by grief –from recent losses or a deep-seated sorrow over many years – that they might know the comfort of hope, the comfort of love, the comfort of new life.

You tell us: Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

So we pray for leaders and followers, for big people and little people, for the proud and the humble, that in acceptance and grace, we might work together for the good of all.

You tell us: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled. So, we pray that we, who seek to live in that very righteousness, might indeed be filled with wonder and joy in this very place.

You tell us:

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

So, let us forgive others that we might know and understand the true meaning of forgiveness.

You tell us: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

So, make our hearts pure with us, that we might know Your love all the more.

You tell us: Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called the children of God. So we pray for all who work for peace: peace in relationships; peace in communities; peace in politics; peace in places of conflict; peace for the body, mind and soul ... that all might see themselves and others as God's children.

You tell us: Blessed are those who are persecuted ... for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So we pray for the broken and despised, the marginalised and the downtrodden, the victims and the dispossessed, the refugees and the homeless ...this kingdom, our precious kingdom, belongs also to them.

And as we pray for others, we pray also that You will hold us always in communion with the Saints of all the ages, those who have been blessed and whose memories, example and closeness bless us, even at this present time.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Hymn: For all the saints (<https://youtu.be/1OaBgaMcOvM>)

Blessing

Go now, with the blessings of the saints and angels.

Go now, with the blessings of the people in this place.

Go now, with the blessings of the whole people of God.

Go now, with the blessings of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to keep you in blessedness, now and always. Amen