

## Saints and Climate Change

Today is Halloween...and I think it's a bit like Marmite...you either love it or hate it !! We may choose to

celebrate with the children..because they certainly will want to as a harmless bit of fun !

or dismiss it as an unnecessary celebration of spooky ghosts and ghouls that can only be associated with evil .Indeed the celebration of such things was all part of Pagan Festivals which predated Christ.

But we should also remember that in the the 7<sup>th</sup> century the **Catholic** Church held vigils on All Hallows Eve (All Saints eve) when priests would travel their neighbourhood visiting the home of the recently departed and pray with the family that their loved ones, believed to be in that place between life and death called Purgatory, would transcend to heaven rather than hell. In return for their prayers they would be offered cakes and sweetmeats...this custom has been largely hijacked by secular society and this is where Trick or Treating now so much part of Halloween had its origins though grossly distorted by the Americans and more recently in the UK where in 2019 it was an industry amounting to nearly 500 million pound a year.

Tomorrow is All Saints day

What is a Saint?

One who is given the title **Saint** is **a holy person who is known for his or her miracles, “heroic sanctity” and who is thought to be in heaven.** And some churches have formalized a process for the identification of saints.Roman Catholic ...**Canonization.** Similarly in the Eastern Orthodox church....**Glorification.**

But in the Apostles Creed we say we believe in the **Communion of Saints** so what's that all about? In short it is the **“spiritual union of the members of the Christian Church, both living and dead, all part of a mystical body with Christ as its head “** to which I suggest by our very presence here today we all belong. There may be many reasons why each of us is here today... I suggest it could be for fellowship, to pray for something in particular or in the earnest hope that it will help you to learn and grow as a saint.

There are countless lists of what the marks of a saint are but today I commend to you the **beatitudes.** At first sight we may see the Beatitudes as consolation for the down trodden ..the poor, the meek, the mourners but they are so much more....they are a strict standard of behaviour for all who yearn to be part of God's kingdom, not least those who find themselves in a position of privilege and power.

Blessed in Greek is MAKARIOS which can otherwise be translated as “happy” (inner joy, right c God

Looking at **how Jesus lives** them out himself is the best way of understanding what they mean, for as we choose to step into God's Kingdom (or the communion of saints) and become His child we seek to become more like Jesus and live as those who are named as blessed. Some are easier than others..yes purity, peacemakers, merciful... that's good, but what about poor in spirit, the hungry and thirsty and those who mourn.

In the gospels, Jesus lives this life of blessing. He walks closely with God.

**He is humble (poor in Spirit)** and willing to walk in God's way ...the way of the Cross. For us there will be other crosses to bear as we seek to receive the blessings of God's Kingdom.

**Jesus mourns**..his heart breaks, he cries out in sadness and anguish to God for those who turn against Him. He wept over Jerusalem as He thought of those who were about to reject Him.

The trouble is that the beatitudes are impossibly hard to fulfil to perfection but we fear not for that is where God's grace is bountiful. So the more our desire to become part of God's Kingdom the more each beatitude becomes a moral imperative, a yardstick to aim at and a virtue to lay at Christ's feet with the earnest plea to God to give us enough of His spirit that we can live in Christ's way and so grow his kingdom.

Now I want to move on and suggest that any passage we read in the Bible can be read and interpreted in many different ways depending on our agenda at the time...One of the things sessions that the COP26 course that Jacky and I have undertaken was entitled Climate Theology. And the suggestion was made that we could undertake to read the whole Bible with CC in mind and find that there is so much that speaks directly or indirectly to us on this subject. So if we apply this to the Beatitudes...what do they tell us about our approach to CC. Well the answer is quite a lot!

They tell us that to be happy is the antithesis of all that the world we live in pushes us to believe: that in order to be happy we have to be rich, own lots of material things, have an extensive wardrobe etc. It's difficult isn't it. I understand only very basic concepts of the principles of economics on which our government seems to depend... but note that a sign of success in our economy is related to how much we, the consumers, spend. The more we spend the better...but the obsession for growth based on material possessions is at the heart of the climate crisis.

**Being poor in spirit** is to take on the humility and simplicity of life and an awareness of our dependency on others and on God.

In the spirit of the Beatitudes, maybe it is **time for us to collectively mourn** with one another, with our neighbours, and with our poor Earth. We need to reflect on our human consumption, our uses of natural resources and to make changes to our lifestyles in order to save our poorer neighbours, our common home and future generations.

This is the third time I have spoken about Climate Crisis...the first time I emphasised the importance of protecting this wonderful home we call Earth, made for us by God which we are trusted to Care for, not exploit. The second time I spoke about Climate Justice, our consumption at the expense of poorer nations who contribute least to but suffer most from climate change.

So the third reason which is so clear in Matthew 6 where Jesus is expanding on the Beatitudes is this...That we "Lay not up for ourselves treasure on earth where moth and rust corrupt, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ...

Let me tell you about two men.

Jay Gould was a famous American millionaire whose whole life was driven by the need to make money. He was probably most famous for his contribution to developing America's vast rail network though his early years one could say he was infamous for his dealings in buying and selling which bordered on the criminal and sometimes at the expense of others. He died leaving 50 million dollars but he is quoted as saying towards the end of his life, "I must be the most miserable devil on Earth"

and his death certificate recorded that death was due in part to mental strain. So rich and yet so unhappy!

Contrast him with George Cadbury of chocolate fame. Brought up in the poorest parts of Birmingham known as the “back to backs,” - the crowded terraced housing where large families were living in single rooms, George and his brother Richard took over their father’s struggling chocolate factory in the centre of Birmingham. As it grew and flourished George was able to purchase land on the outskirts of Birmingham in an area now known as Bourneville. Cadbury built over 300 houses with gardens for his workers and set up sports fields and schools for the use of his staff and their families. He believed this would give them a happier family life. All this was paid for with his own money and later he signed it all over to the “Bourneville Village Trust” in 1900. He is said to have declared that he couldn’t possibly spend a fortune on himself when there is so much misery in the world. He surely died happy.

Many Saints have sacrificed a life of material things for the sake of the gospel...now we are called to do so for the sake of our Creation, God’s Creation and to save our brothers and sisters in the poorer more vulnerable parts of the world...and future generations here.

This Church has thought long and hard about what this means, on your behalf Jacky and I have zoomed in on Make COP26 count meetings and tried to share with you what we have learned. And now around 200 world leaders are gathered in Glasgow...the stakes are high. The 12 day meeting has been billed as: The last best chance...**A pivotal moment**...The Olympic games of Climate change. The royals have expressed a wish that leaders will not just talk but act!

Now as COP26 begins what we must do is do is **PRAY:please accept one of the yellow COP26 prayer guide leaflets as you leave** .The Bible is clear that prayer can move mountains. Since the beginning of time, people with nowhere else to go have got down on their knees and cried out to God. Such are the times we are in-can I encourage all of you to pray regularly for the current crisis and for those on the front line tackling it?

James 5:16 The Effectual Fervent Prayer of a Righteous man availeth much !!