

**Service for St John the Evangelist – Kingston Park**

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021**

**Call to worship** – (from the Desperate Preachers website)

We remember, O God...

**The countless saints of history  
who have blazed a trail of courage through time,**

We remember, O God...

**The tender touch of loved ones,  
the example of heroes,  
the healing words of comforters,  
the remarkable acts of fearless ones.**

We remember, O God...

**The gentle strength of grandmothers,  
the loyalty of friends,  
the kindness of strangers,  
the joy of children,  
the sacrifice of parents.**

We remember, O God...

**The supreme love of Jesus,  
the blessing of his Spirit,  
the reminder of his words,  
the sharing of his suffering,  
the glory of his resurrection:  
shown forth in the lives of his disciples,  
young and old,  
dead and living,  
articulate and silent,  
strange and familiar,  
brilliant and ordinary.**

We remember in every time and place the saints of God  
who have shown us the Lord.

**Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...  
let us worship God with joy!**

## **Hymn - For All the Saints**

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!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might;  
thou, Lord, their captain in the well fought fight;  
thou, in the darkness drear their one true light.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Oh, 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!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

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!

The golden evening brightens in the west;  
soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest;  
sweet is the calm of paradise the blest.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

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!

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!

Words by William Walshaw How

**Prayers** – by Julian Sanders (URC Prayer Handbook 2021)

Father God,  
we come before you today to offer you  
our praise and worship.  
Grant that we may be sincere of heart.

If we come doubting our own  
worth and faithfulness to you,  
remind us of those moments when we have been  
agents of your love;  
those simple gestures –  
a smile, a touch, a helping hand –  
which shared something of the Gospel message  
with those we have come alongside.

If we come full of our own goodness and righteousness,  
remind us what pleases you;  
bring us down to earth again  
so that we are not raised above the crowds,  
but amongst all your people  
where your work is really done.

May our praise and worship be pleasing to you.  
Let us not offer you wordy prayers that have little meaning.  
Let us not offer you spare change at little cost to ourselves.  
Let us not praise you today, then go out to live lives  
which, for the rest of the week, express little of your goodness.  
May we come with open hearts and open minds  
ready to be cleansed by your spirit  
and inspired by your word.

Amen

## **Alternative Lord's Prayer**

Our Father who dwells in the heavens and on the earth, You are Holy.  
May heaven be a greater present reality here on earth,  
And may we choose to join you in making that happen.  
Provide us today with the things that you think we need,  
And may we not take for granted that which you have already provided for us.  
Forgive us for when we don't live as you intend,  
And may we be ready to forgive others when they don't live as we intend.  
Guide us in your wisdom away from the things that would distort us,  
And restore the parts in us that are already distorted.  
You are goodness, beauty and truth,  
May your love rule always.

Amen

## **Readings – Revelation 21:1-6a**

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

<sup>5</sup>He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

<sup>6</sup>He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

## **John 11:32-44**

<sup>32</sup>When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

<sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

<sup>37</sup> But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

<sup>38</sup> Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. <sup>39</sup> “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

<sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup> I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

<sup>43</sup> When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

### **Sermon - (Adele)**

I’m pretty certain you will be aware that it’s Halloween today - a fact that can hardly be missed as the shops have been filled with pumpkins and scary masks for weeks and there are horror movies constantly being advertised on TV. As trick or treaters prepare to knock on doors later today, I wonder how many will be aware that this is actually All Hallows’ Eve - the day before we celebrate all the hallowed ones - all the saints. As you will have gathered, All Saints is the focus of our service today, and I feel it is a great opportunity for us to

remember that saints are all those who believe and trust in Jesus whether on earth or in heaven. Today we think about the fact that life continues beyond this earthly life, and that the way we live now has a bearing on our eternal future.

Such continuity of life was dramatically represented at the funeral of Prince Philip back in April, when the Last Post was sounded and then after just a moment of silence, the Reveille. The call signalling the end of the day's activities, followed immediately by that signalling the time to arise to a new day.

Our Bible readings today speak of the reality of death and the pain that afflicts those who are left behind, but also of the truth that Jesus has absolute power over death, and that in fact he promises us a life where it will be no more, described in Revelation 21.

In John's gospel in the verses just before today's reading, Jesus has told Mary's sister Martha, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die'. In other words whoever believes in Jesus has a spiritual life that death cannot conquer or diminish in any way. However in Jesus' interaction with Mary we recognise the fact that despite knowing this truth, it still hurts when we lose someone we love, and Jesus weeps with Mary in her sorrow and then goes on to call her brother Lazarus from the tomb, thus demonstrating his power over death.

So what of these saints on earth and in heaven who we bring to mind today? I'm sure we all have our own pictures that pop into our heads at the mention of saints. Perhaps from handed down stories of wonderful, peaceful and noble individuals. Maybe we picture those depicted in stained glass windows with pious expressions and the sun streaming through and bathing us in coloured light. Maybe the word 'saintly' has rather negative connotations, suggesting an insufferable 'goody goody' character, far removed from the reality of life. With all the noble things they did and their perfect expressions of peace, it's somewhat hard to imagine saints doing ordinary things like getting irritated by the length of queue at the checkout, or feeling angry when people pull out in front of us when we're driving the car. We rather imagine them unruffled by the things which give us sleepless nights, sailing through their sufferings, helped by some saintly gene we have not inherited.

Perhaps the most important thing we celebrate today is that, however we imagine them, and however beautiful their monuments, saints are fundamentally as ordinary as the rest of us, and it is therefore just as possible for all of us to be saintly too.

Real saints have their feet fixed firmly in the real world, loving and appreciating it. They are people who live by the command to love God and one another - not something you can do from an ethereal distance. Loving means getting involved, getting hurt, seeing the funny side, and learning from our embarrassing mistakes and all our experience. These are real, ordinary people with their individual ways and habits, facing tough decisions, making mistakes, and simply doing the best they can.

They have become saints through living ordinary lives closely in God's company. The refining of our lives takes place through living, and no one can side-step that requirement. As Jesus said, if we try to protect and shield our life we end up not keeping it safe but losing it. It is those who daily give it joyfully away who end up gaining the heavenly life which lasts forever. I like the words in a hymn by Christopher Idle, 'All the saints who serve in heaven, all the saints who serve on earth: only God has made them holy; they are saints by God's new birth.

I've heard it said: 'What makes a saint is someone who tastes the sweetness of God's amazing love and savours it, enjoying it and thanking God for it. Living like that is what transforms their lives, so that when people are with them they know they are in the presence of God. They can detect God's peace, God's love and God's joy.' We are called to be saints, set apart as friends of Jesus, walking through this life in his company and dying in his company. But what about after that? Our reading from Revelation suggests to us a wonderful gathering in to be with God. 'They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God,' and 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' It's difficult to describe heaven using our ordinary vocabulary, but we do have some idea, and we sense a glorious welcoming love and homecoming waiting for anyone who has spent their earthly life close to Jesus, loving God and loving those around them.

So we take this opportunity to celebrate All Saints Day – a time when we bring to mind those who have travelled on before us, those who have 'fought the fight, finished the race, kept the faith, and claimed the crown of righteousness' (2 Tim 4:7). Those who have claimed the crown of righteousness have done so, not because they have lived pure, blameless, 'saintly' lives, but because God loves with such abundance that he offers forgiveness through Jesus. He offers to clothe us also in robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). None of us would call ourselves saints, and yet we are encouraged to consider that being a saint, being a holy person is not so much about what we do, but rather about what God offers to do for us and with us. As God fills our lives with love so we are able, not to do

'saintly' things, but rather to continue doing ordinary things with extraordinary love.

In a few days it will be November 5th and, love them or hate them, the skies will be filled with fireworks. This brings to mind a great description of saints which can be found in a book called 'Stars and Angels' by Michael Stancliffe and it talks of them in this way:

Saints are God's fireworks, rising like rockets from the darkness of the world... who live Christian lives of colour, crackle, sparkle... they are exhilarating in their effect... people who are fired with the love of God, let themselves go and allow themselves to be utterly burnt up and consumed for the sake of the glory of God, lighting up the darkness of the world around them... there is nothing damp about them... The good firework is not damp. It is dry as tinder, it is touched with fire, it lets itself go, and allows itself to be totally burnt up in producing that which is lovely and of good report.

That's a brilliant picture isn't it, and one which we might bring to mind as the fireworks fly in the coming days.

And a final thought... Through the joys and trials of my life I have found myself surrounded by saints. I have been supported, prayed for and loved in the most extraordinary way. I feel honoured to belong to such a 'band of saints' here at St John's and look forward to our travelling on together in faith, with hope, and most of all sharing that extraordinary love demonstrated most powerfully by Jesus and echoed in our attitude towards one another.

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Kingston Park... Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Phil 1:1-2 adapted!)

### **Prayers of Intercession** – written by Susan Sayers

We pray for all the saints on earth,  
all those walking as friends of Jesus  
through the light and shadows of life,  
in grassy meadows and scaling bare rock;  
that we may all persevere with joy,  
supporting one another along the way.

Not our will, Lord: **but yours be done.**

We pray for all the kingdoms and nations of the earth,  
for their leaders and their people,  
their policies and needs, thinking especially at this time of COP 26,  
that under God's overarching love  
they may learn his ways and his will.

Not our will, Lord: **but yours be done.**

We pray for those we love and care for  
and those who love and pray for us,  
for the wisdom to learn  
from all we experience in this life,  
so that we are not damaged,  
but rather grow from the difficult times.

Not our will, Lord: **but yours be done.**

We pray for those who are suffering  
and those too weak to pray;  
for all who are searching for life's meaning  
and those who find it hard to believe  
they are loved and cherished by the living God.

Not our will, Lord: **but yours be done.**

We pray for those who have died in faith,  
giving thanks for the shining lives of the saints,  
and asking that with them  
we may come to share  
in the endless joy of heaven.

Not our will, Lord: **but yours be done.**

With thankfulness we celebrate  
the transforming love of God,  
which can take us as we are  
and make us into what God can already see  
we could become.

Merciful Father,  
accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

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**Song:** There is a Hope

There is a hope that burns within my heart,  
That gives me strength for every passing day;  
A glimpse of glory now revealed in meagre part,  
Yet drives all doubt away:  
I stand in Christ, with sins forgiven;  
And Christ in me, the hope of heaven!  
My highest calling and my deepest joy,  
To make His will my home.

There is a hope that lifts my weary head,  
A consolation strong against despair,  
That when the world has plunged me in its deepest pit,  
I find the Saviour there!  
Through present sufferings, future's fear,  
He whispers 'courage' in my ear.  
For I am safe in everlasting arms,  
And they will lead me home.

There is a hope that stands the test of time,  
That lifts my eyes beyond the beckoning grave,  
To see the matchless beauty of a day divine  
When I behold His face!  
When sufferings cease and sorrows die,  
And every longing satisfied.  
Then joy unspeakable will flood my soul,  
For I am truly home.

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**Blessing** – Written by Bruce Prewer

Go on your way rejoicing;  
Surrounded as you are by such a great cloud of witnesses,  
    take courage as you face each new challenge,  
    and comfort when you pick yourself from a fall,  
In whatever good you choose to do,  
precede it with hope,  
accompany it with prayer,  
and follow it with thanksgiving.

The blessing of God Most Wonderful,  
whom the saints have trusted as  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us all  
now and ever more.

**Amen**