

SERMON. 4/11/18

This is a beautiful gothic style building, All Saints' Anglican Church

Bodalla. I have wondered why it is named 'All Saints' and not for an individual saint. This is something I would like to return to later.

There are some other questions I would like to pose and discuss. Firstly, what indeed is a saint?

Perhaps we think of saints as statues in and around a church or cathedral building. Or perhaps a person of faith who has died and been 'beatified' or 'canonized'.

The root word of 'saint' corresponds to the Latin word 'sanctus' meaning holy or sacred. Do Christians have to be dead for some time before they can be declared saints or does God call us saints while we are still alive? What does the Bible say about this?

In the Old Testament, the plural form 'saints' is taken from the Hebrew and refers to holiness and could also mean faithfulness. Hebrews chapter 11 gives many examples of the famous people in Israel's history who could be considered as saints because of their faithfulness. Then in Chapter 12 verse 1 we are told "As for us, we have the large crowd of witnesses around us".

There are many references to the saints in the New Testament. However, here they refer to those faithful who are alive at the time of the letters of Paul, John, Luke and Peter.

Romans 1:7 "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ".

Acts 9:32 "And it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydia".

It is clear that those who were believers and were alive already had the title of 'saint'. You don't have to be dead to be a saint.

Scripturally speaking, the saints are the body of Christ, Christians, the Church. All Christians, those who trust in Christ for salvation, are considered to be saints and at the same time are called to be saints. We are made holy by Christ on the cross. We ourselves are not holy, but once saved through faith we are chosen by God to spread the word of the Gospel.

There is a story of a modern day saint who was saved through faith and made holy. Importantly he went on to spread the Gospel by his actions.

Joe was a wino who everyone expected to be nothing but a homeless drunk. However, at a mission he was converted and his life transformed. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Joe became a caring person who spent all his time at the mission serving both the homeless and the drunk as well as the Christian workers. He considered no job beneath his dignity. He could be counted on to clean up after drunks and feed those who wandered in off the street.

One Sunday in the mission, a repentant drunk shuffled down the aisle to the altar and knelt to pray, crying out to God for help. He kept shouting, "Oh God, make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe". The evangelist of the mission leaned over and said to the man "Son, I think it would be better if you prayed, 'Make me like Jesus!'". The man looked up with a puzzled expression and asked "Is he like Joe?".

Whether we sell shoes, programme computers, drive trucks, help out at missions or are

retired from paid work, we bring healing to our world when we direct people to Jesus by the goodness and compassion in our everyday lives.

This leads to a second question: What is All Saints' Day?

In many denominations of the Christian Church, All Saints' Day is celebrated on November 1st, followed by All Souls' Day on the 2nd. This special day stems from a belief that there is a powerful and spiritual bond between those in heaven and the living.

The history of this day has made very interesting and varied reading for me, as has the way it is celebrated in various ways and many countries. It is a national holiday in many historically Roman Catholic Countries. In Mexico, it coincides with the first day of the Day of the Dead celebrations. In other countries the tradition is to light candles and visit the graves of deceased relatives.

Centuries ago, when the Roman Empire persecuted Christians, the church set aside special days to honour the many martyrs who died for their faith. About AD 610, the Parthenon in Rome turned into a Christian Church and was dedicated to all saints.

The 1662 Book of Common Prayer says that this holy day stands for 'the uniting of Christians of all ages, countries and races in Christ and the perfection of that unity in heaven'.

Who are your favourite heroes in Christian history? Can you think of any whose example has inspired you? Why not use the celebration of All Saints' Day to think of and give thanks for as many Christians from the past as you can remember. Now this does not mean that they need to have been famous in worldly terms. It is more special if their lives and teaching and example have contributed something to our Christian walk in a personal way. Perhaps a relative, a childhood friend, a loved one.

On this day we remember all Christians, past and present. It reminds us that God has redeemed us in Christ as a family, as a community – the 'communion of saints' as stated in the Apostles' Creed. We remember that we are one with all others who, with us, are saints of God; 'a great cloud of witnesses'. We particularly remember and give thanks for those we know who have died. We give thanks for them and in prayer continue to entrust them to God's mercy and keeping, looking forward to being reunited with them and with Christ.

So, back to the question "Why was this building and church community named All Saints'?" I would like to believe that it was because it was intended to be the 'communion of saints' where over generations the people of God work to spread the Gospel through their actions. Let us remember all the saints, past and present, we know and have known.

Collect of All Saints. Book of Common Prayer. 1979.

Almighty God,
Who hast knit together thine elect
In one communion and fellowship
In the mystical body of Your Son, Christ our Lord:
Give us grace so to follow Your blessed saints
In all virtuous and godly living,
That we may come
To those ineffable joys

That thou hast prepared for those
Who unfeignedly love thee;
Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth
One God, in glory everlasting.
Amen.