

## Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 – All Saints' Day

### Order of Service

**Gathering hymn: StF 505 More like you, Jesus, more like you**

*More like You, Jesus, more like You,  
fill my heart with Your desire, to make me more like You.  
More like You, Jesus, more like You,  
touch my lips with holy fire and make me more like You.*

Lord you are my mercy, Lord you are my grace.  
All my deepest sins have forever been erased.  
Draw me in Your presence, lead me in Your ways,  
I long to bring You glory in righteousness and praise.  
*More like You Jesus, more like You.....*

Lord you are compassion and never-ending love.  
Lord, you have redeemed me, by your priceless blood.  
Create in me a clean heart, a spirit that is pure.  
The joy of my salvation is only found in you.  
*More like You Jesus, more like You.....*

Scott Wesley Brown

### **Opening words:**

Today our worship will reflect the fact that it is All Saints' Day. We shall also have opportunity later to eat and drink as we share in a love feast.

The Psalm set for today is Psalm 43 and some of the words of this Psalm are used in our call to worship as we come together in these moments to worship God.

O God, send out your light and your truth; let them lead us.

O God, let them bring us to this time of worship and to your dwelling amongst us.

We will praise you, our God. In you is our hope, our refuge and our help.

### **Hymn: StF 83 Praise my soul the King of Heaven**

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven, to his feet your tribute bring;  
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like you his praise should sing?  
Praise him, praise him, praise him, praise him, praise the everlasting King.

Praise him for his grace and favour to our fathers in distress;  
praise him, still the same as ever, slow to blame and swift to bless;  
praise him, praise him, praise him, praise him, glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like, he tends and spares us, all our hopes and fears he knows;  
in his hands he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes:  
praise him, praise him, praise him, praise him, widely as his mercy flows.

Angels, help us to adore him; ye behold him face to face;  
sun and moon, bow down before him, praise him all in time and space.  
praise him, praise him, praise him, praise him, praise with us the God of grace  
Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847) (adapted)

**Prayers:**

Holy and loving God, we know that in coming towards you, you came towards us first. You have called us by name, drawing us close to you and into a community of faith where we seek to love and care for one another.

We thank you that when Jesus says 'Follow me' he invites us to draw close to him - to ponder on his words and teaching; to discover meaning through his life that he lives for us and for all; to receive his Spirit as comforter and inspiring presence calling us onward into ever deeper faith.

We praise you for all this and we hold our hands out humbly offering you all that we have; knowing that you receive what we are able to give.

You call us towards love of other, self and stranger, you call us towards an even greater hospitality than we can begin to imagine.

We know there are times when we limit your love; when we limit your grace; times when we judge and withhold; discriminate and are prejudiced in our thought and deed.

Forgive us.

*In a time of quiet offer your own prayer to God.*

Support us, O Lord, in turning back to you so that we are open to your renewal and refreshment and more able to be the people that you would have us be.

Receive our prayers, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

**Bible readings: 1 Thessalonians 2: 9-13**

<sup>9</sup> You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. <sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. <sup>11</sup> As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, <sup>12</sup> urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. <sup>13</sup> We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

**Matthew 23: 1-12: Jesus Denounces Scribes and Pharisees**

**23** Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, <sup>2</sup> "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; <sup>3</sup> therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do

as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. <sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. <sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. <sup>6</sup> They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, <sup>7</sup> and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. <sup>8</sup> But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. <sup>9</sup> And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. <sup>10</sup> Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. <sup>11</sup> The greatest among you will be your servant. <sup>12</sup> All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

**Hymn: StF 611 Brother, sister, let me serve you**

Brother, sister, let me serve you; let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road;  
we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ light for you in the night time of your fear;  
I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I'll laugh with you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow, till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven, we shall find such harmony,  
born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you; let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

Richard A M Gillard (b:1953)

**Sermon**

If I were to ask you to quickly compile a list of saints I wonder how many you would get? We could make the task a little harder and I could offer extra points for the more obscure saints that you might know that others don't!

Rev Richard Coles (now a Parish priest in Northamptonshire and radio and TV star, but once a member of the pop group The Communards and dancing contestant in Strictly...) via Twitter will often mention obscure Saints' days. Two to pick out from October are that on the 1<sup>st</sup> we could have celebrated St Baaf, who gave all his wealth away and went to live in the hollow of a tree. He is the patron saint of falconry and those who are scared of mice. On the 24<sup>th</sup> October we could have celebrated the life of St Magloire

of Dol, a 6<sup>th</sup> Century Breton monk, who struggled so terribly with abstinence that an angel visited and gave him permission to partake of a little wine and beer. He's patron saint of those who abandon diets. He's my personal favourite. If either of these made it onto your list give yourself a pat on the back and some extra bonus points!

Seriously, I wonder if any of you thought about adding your own name to your list of saints or the name of someone else whose faith shone from them and so encouraged you to believe? In terms of a Christian understanding of what it means to be a saint we have two interconnected thoughts. If we think about what it means to be a Saint with a capital S then we probably understand this to be a person who has been recognised by parts of the universal church as 'set apart' and exceptionally holy and through canonisation they are given great emulation and honour. However, in the biblical tradition the word saint, with a small s is used to describe anyone who is seeking to follow Jesus as every Christian is set apart to do God's will. The New Testament uses the word saint or saints 67 times and in every instance the reference is to all believers. In this sense we are all saints! Or we might prefer to think of ourselves as 'saints in progress', as we seek to follow Christ day by day. What do our Bible readings tell us about what it means to be a saint in today's world? I want to suggest three things from the two Bible readings we have set for today that could be seen as life lessons for us as saints seeking to live out our calling. The first two come from the Gospel reading and the third follows from the passage from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians.

In Matthew 23 as a whole we are thrown into the middle of a growing conflict as we encounter harsh words for the Scribes and the Pharisees coming from the lips of Jesus. Matthew has prepared his audience for this speech by escalating the conflict between Jesus and various authorities. Things have really intensified now that Jesus is in Jerusalem. We would need considerably more time than we have here to explore Jesus' relationship with the Jews of his day, and the relationship between the early Christian community and the Jews that are in the mind of Matthew as he writes his gospel. Today we are more interested in finding the deeper challenges that lie beyond these relationships and are relevant to us as Christ's disciples, his saints today. Jesus is challenging the view of what makes for authentic teaching and authentic faith. True teaching, true faith, Jesus says, manifests itself at two levels.

**Firstly, we have to live out, what we believe.** We mustn't be hypocritical. We must practise what we preach. Do as we say. It's easy to say all the right things, give all the best advice, and know and even understand lots of things about faith but if we don't actually put any of it into action then, just like James says in his New Testament letter, 'faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead'. The content of what we believe has to show itself in our conduct.

**Secondly, in living out our faith we have to constantly be on guard against promoting our own status.** Living according to God's word means living as a servant.

"The greatest among you will be your servant" (v11), Jesus says. Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees is relevant to all of us. Sometimes we might love the trappings of living according to God's word too much and we might even set ourselves up for applause. But Jesus' interpretation of the law underscores that all humans are on a level playing field. God extends mercy to all, including the tax collector and the sinner. The one who seeks attention and status through God's law misinterprets it. The attitude of a servant is more appropriate, for the servant shapes their actions according to the master's will.

**Thirdly, a word about Paul and the call to humility.** Last week we reflected on Paul's gentle nature with those he shared the gospel with. The passage this week immediately follows on and we find Paul reflecting again on his time with the Thessalonians. Paul had only recently left Thessalonica when he wrote this letter, and it still contains the buzz and energy of his engagement with this relatively new Christian community. In his time with them Paul talks about their 'labour and toil' and how they lived out humbly their calling amongst them. Paul, using his own way of life as an example, understands that the Gospel of Christ is not a set of ideas about Jesus or about God, but rather a set of embodied commitments to *be a Word of God* in one's own context, however difficult. As believers, as saints, we are each called to 'lead a life worthy of God'.

So, on All Saints' Day, as we reflect on the lives of all the saints (those with a big S and those with a small s) including ourselves, we might ponder on:

Do we always live in accordance with what we profess and proclaim to believe? Does the content of our faith align with our conduct?

Do we seek a humble path and accept that our calling is to one of humility and what does that mean for each one of us?

Do we always lead a life worthy of God?

These are challenging questions for us to reflect on, but in all of this we remember that God is with us and we are not alone. It is fitting that today's short passage from 1 Thessalonians doesn't end with Paul, but with God, "who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (v12). As Christians, by faith, we are in communion with God, drawn into a loving and abiding relationship with him and we are called into a kingdom with others, a community of faith where we seek to live together encouraging and helping one another. In the words of our second hymn:

'Brother, sister, let me serve you; let me be as Christ to you;  
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.'

### **Intercessions**

Glory to you, O Lord, from the whole company of heaven, from the saints in glory, from your people on earth.

Father, we give you thanks that in the darkness of this world your saints shine. May we, with them, have a share in your everlasting kingdom; through Christ our Lord.

We give you praise for holy men and women who have been an inspiration to us, for those who have set us an example to follow. May your church be inspired by their lives, seek to keep before it their dedication, and follow after their vision.

We pray for all who are seeking to fulfil their vocation, for all who seek to quietly dedicate themselves to you and your glory.

Lord of the saints, strengthen our faith.

Blessed are you, Lord our God. You have called us to a world full of good things. We thank you for all who have set out to improve our world.

We pray for all who work in conservation, for those who care for others, for all who have sacrificed themselves in the service of others, for those who seek to live simply that others may simply live.

Lord of the saints, strengthen our faith.

We give you thanks for those who taught us the faith, for those who gave generously and sacrificially for us, for all who have led us in the ways of goodness and truth.

We gather our prayers together in the words of the Lord's Prayer.

### **Sharing in the Love Feast**

Charles Wesley wrote only one specific hymn for the love feast, 'Come, and let us sweetly join'. There were 22 eight line verses in the original! Verses from this hymn appear in StF 646 and our love feast prayer is adapted from these verses.

Let us pray:

We come together with one accord to give glory to God, who is our Lord and Saviour, we sing his praises and lift our hearts in union with one another as we celebrate this feast of love.

We invite Jesus as a dear expected guest, and we open our hearts asking that He would come, and rest in us.

Breathe your Spirit upon us, give us peace;

Breath of God move within us and make our feast a feast of love. Amen

*We eat and drink our bread/cake and water.*

Loving God, we thank you for the unity we share through our faith in you. We thank you for the different ways that you nourish us in our journeys of life and faith. Inspire us in our worship and stir our hearts to love one another just as you have loved us. Amen.

**Hymn: StF 504 May the mind of Christ my Saviour**

May the mind of Christ, my Saviour, live in me from day to day,  
by His love and power controlling all I do and say.

May the Word of God dwell richly in my heart from hour to hour,  
so that all may see I triumph only through His power.

May the peace of God my Father rule my life in everything,  
that I may be calm to comfort sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me, as the waters fill the sea;  
Him exalting, self-abasing, this is victory.

May I run the race before me, strong and brave to face the foe,  
Looking only unto Jesus as I onward go.

May His beauty rest upon me as I seek the lost to win,  
and may they forget the channel, seeing only Him.

K Barclay Wilkinson (1859-1928)

### **Offertory prayer**

God of the saints, accept these our gifts and we - the givers. May these gifts be used to help build the future of your kingdom, in this place and around the world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

### **Closing words**

God of power and light, send us out as children of light.

May we go out and be blessed - be blessed by the Kingdom of God, which is turning everything upside down. Amen

### **Blessing**

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us this day and with all those we know and love, now and forevermore, Amen.