



All Saints Day

Gathering

*Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle. This week, it would be appropriate to find a **white** cloth or scarf because this is a special celebration day. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that this is God's land that the First Nations people have cared for across many generations. Its land, its waters, flora and fauna have sustained life.

We pay our respects to the elders past, present and those to come.

May we be reconciled and renewed with one another.

May we find justice and peace together.

May we listen well and walk gently together.

Lighting the Christ Candle

Jesus Light of the world, as we light this candle, we remember your love for each one of us. Help us be a light in this world for You. As this light penetrates the darkness, let our light, life and witness, impact this darkened world for You for Your honor and Your glory. Amen.

Call to worship (based on Psalm 107:1-7,33-37)

We are gathered here

from north and south,

from west and east;

to give thanks to God,

whose steadfast love exists forever.

Song – Gather Us In (Tis 474)

Here in this place new light is streaming

Now is the darkness vanished away

See in this space our fears and our dreamings

Brought here to you in the light of this day

Gather us in, the lost and forsaken

Gather us in, the blind and the lame

Call to us now and we shall awaken

We shall arise at the sound of our name

We are the young, our lives are a mystery

We are the old who yearn for your face

We have been sung throughout all of history

Called to be light to the whole human race

Gather us in, the rich and the haughty

Gather us in, the proud and the strong

Give us a heart so meek and so lowly

Give us the courage to enter the song

Here we will take the wine and the water
Here we will take the bread of new birth
Here you shall call your sons and your daughters
Call us anew to be salt for the earth
Give us to drink the wine of compassion
Give us to eat the bread that is you
Nourish us well and teach us to fashion
Lives that are holy and hearts that are true

Not in the dark of buildings confining
Not in some heaven light years away
But here in this place the new light is shining
Now is the kingdom, now is the day
Gather us in and hold us forever
Gather us in and make us your own
Gather us in, all peoples together
Fire of love in our flesh and our bones.

(Marty Haugen)

Prayer

Gracious God our companion and guide, we would be lost without your direction - wanderers in a wilderness of our own making. We praise you for dealing so graciously with your people in the past, when you have guided them into a deeper relationship with you. When you gave them freedom and a promised new life for all eternity. We are heirs of that promise fulfilled in Jesus, our Redeemer, teacher, and Lord. Through him you have established for us a permanent direction for our lives and as we dwell in him, our lives are blessed with fruitfulness. Holy God may this time of worship be a joyful response of praise and thanksgiving for all that you have done, for all that you are doing, and for all that you will continue to do, for us and all people through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

(Maira Laidlaw)

Bible Reading: Matthew 23:1-12 (NRSV Updated Edition)

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses's seat; ³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it, but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴ 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. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶ They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters. ⁹ And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father, the one in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

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Song – Ancient Words

Holy words long preserved
for our walk in this world,
They resound with God's own heart.
Oh let the ancient words impart

*Ancient words ever true
Changing me and changing you,
We have come with open hearts
Oh let the ancient words impart*

Words of Life, words of Hope
Give us strength, help us cope
In this world, where e'er we roam
Ancient words will guide us Home.

Holy words of our Faith
Handed down to this age
Came to us through sacrifice
Oh heed the faithful words of Christ.

Martyrs' blood stains each page,
they have died for this faith;
hear them cry through the years,
heed these words and hold them dear.

Ancient words ever true...

Holy words long preserved

For our walk in this world.
They resound with God's own heart
Oh let the ancient words impart.

Ancient words ever true...

We have come with open hearts

Oh let the ancient words impart

(Michael W. Smith)

Sermon – All Saints

Funerals can be tricky worship services to plan. Making sure as the minister, you hear more than one voice in the eulogy is sometimes hard to do, particularly if there is one family member or friend who believes they know the person who has died the best and they want to control what is said and who says it. I am sure there are lots of stories that could be told about poor behaviour at funerals!

One funeral stands out though. The woman who had passed away was a church goer and I had been to visit her several times as she battled with cancer. Her husband was also very ill but not a church goer. On my first visit to the family home, 2 things were made very clear, the first was that her name was Aline not Aileen, and the second was that she wanted her foster brother to speak at the funeral. She wanted him to do part of the eulogy, no matter what.

Aline was resigned to the fact that her full brother would also speak but she didn't get on with him and was anxious as to what he would say about her at the funeral. Just warning you, she said to me. Thanks very much I thought to myself. Thanks very much indeed. It turns out that this estranged brother was a QC (Queens Council). He arrived at the funeral in a limousine with a personal driver and proceeded to order, I mean organise everyone to his liking. He loudly declared that he was doing the eulogy and no one else was to speak. I calmly told him that I was conducting the funeral and that he was taking part in it, the rest was up to me.

I had emailed him prior to the funeral, setting out his section of the eulogy and that others would also be speaking. I also gave him a time limit which he ignored.

As I began the service, I used Aline's full name and the pronunciation she wanted to be known by for all of her adult life. The brother objected loudly from the floor, and we all continued to speak of Aline as she had instructed.

When the brother did his part of the eulogy that went for half an hour, not the ten minutes I had suggested, it was all about him. He did this, and his sister came along. He did such and such and so did she. It was the worst celebration of a person's life I have ever heard. We were running very late by this stage to get to the crematorium on time and the funeral directors were tearing out their hair. I tried to interrupt a few times but was swiftly put in my place, this was his sister and he was going to take as long as he liked.

I realised when he finished his part of the eulogy that we had missed our time at the crematorium, and we would have to wait for all the other services booked in there that day to take place before we could say our final goodbyes to Aline. So, realising time now didn't matter, I asked the foster brother to share his memories of his sister and it was the best

eulogy I have ever heard. He spoke of her character, her generosity, her humility. He spoke of her wisdom and kindness, her compassion and thoughtfulness.

I gave the invoice for being late at the crematorium to the brother who was a QC.

Our text for today paints a picture of religious leaders who have let their own leadership status get the best of them. In Matthew chapter 23, Matthew gives us a window into Jesus' righteous fire – a fire stirred up by the Pharisees and scribes. By this time in Matthew's gospel, Jesus has achieved notoriety and has stirred up more than a little controversy. This has been a long saga, going all the way back to chapter 3, and this is the culmination of Jesus' interaction with religious leaders.

At this point, Jesus has triumphantly entered Jerusalem and has just spent a long-time answering questions from the religious leaders, the elders, the Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes. The Pharisees and scribes, the chief priests and the elders, and the Sadducees have all played a part in the ongoing conflict with Jesus. He has answered every question and has avoided every trap. And Matthew tells us immediately before our text begins that no one dares to ask him any more questions.

So, in the opening verses of chapter 23, Jesus turns to address the crowds and his disciples, beginning a scathing, chapter-long critique of the scribes and the Pharisees. He does not hold back.

We don't have all the facts about the group called the Pharisees. They seem to have been chiefly concerned about preserving and establishing Jewish identity after the exile, and later during the Roman occupation of Israel in Jesus' time, and then also after the Temple destruction about 40 years after Jesus' death. They were known as scrupulous interpreters of the Jewish law and may even be precursors to the rabbinic tradition. In other words, they were concerned about faithfully setting apart the people of God in a chaotic and violent world...a world filled with uncertainty about God's presence and protection.

The Jewish historian Josephus paints the Pharisees in a positive light, as lenient and well-liked. It's important to know that. There's more to this picture than just what's in front of us. Matthew paints a picture of Jesus criticizing the religious practices of some Pharisees, a small group of a small group to begin with, not of Judaism as a whole, and not even all the Pharisees. These so-called leaders become the perfect narrative foil to Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God.

Even if the picture we get doesn't quite represent the full truth about the Pharisees and scribes, the picture we do get is of a people who are chiefly concerned about sitting in seats of power and prestige, about their distinguished religious leadership, about the appearance of piety rather than the actual performance of it, and about everyone else honouring the status owed to them.

"They do not practice what they teach," Jesus says. "They tie up heavy burdens [meaning law observance], hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries [adornments that contained fragments of Scripture] broad and their fringes [sown onto robes as reminders of the commandments] long. They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have people call them rabbi."

These are quite the accusations. Matthew doesn't just tell this story to relive a speech tearing apart a rival religious group from Jesus' day. Matthew isn't just taking a chance to stick his thumb in the eyes of the scribes and Pharisees in his own day, some 50 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. Matthew seems to tell this story because he knows that members of his own community need to hear it. Matthew wants his community to overhear Jesus blasting the scribes and Pharisees because there are probably some members of the community repeating the same kinds of mistakes in the new Christian community.

Matthew knows that power, pride, and prestige always tempt. Always. Those things mock true faithfulness: they tear down community by making other people a pawn in a religious game of status-seeking. They make devotion nothing more than a show – and a fashion show at that. They crave titles and credit. They cheapen witness to God by separating belief from action. But Matthew also knows that humility, integrity, service, and solidarity are the counter-notes of the kingdom of God. These are the ways of Jesus. And he knows that they are standard operating procedure for the Christian community – both for those who seek to lead in the way of Jesus and those who seek to follow Jesus. Power, pride, and prestige tempt to cheapen faith and witness. Humility, integrity, service, and solidarity help make God's ways visible in the world. That was true then. And it's true now.

When we think back to the Christian people who have had a positive impact on our faith and our lives, it isn't the ones who we put up on a pedestal and who were so far out of reach we could never emulate them. It is the people who walked alongside us, listening, guiding, admonishing us, teaching, encouraging. It is the people who are 'real' in their own struggles and who share our joys and sorrows who make the difference to us.

Today we also think about all the saints of the church who have sacrificed their lives and livelihood in the face of injustice, those who have stood side-by-side with the suffering, those who worked tirelessly for the dignity of people on the margins, those who stood up to destructive power, and those who would not shrink back from the ways of Jesus when offered an easier way. Yes, we celebrate them and the loyal church members who live with humility, integrity, service, and solidarity - they come in all shapes and sizes.

This is what the saints teach us: those faithful people of God who many of us honour today. In ways big and small, ordinary and extraordinary, these are the faithful people whose lives show us the ways of God's kingdom. Add up the stories of their lives and you will hear again and again stories of people who humbled themselves, when they could have exalted themselves. They understood the upside-down kingdom of God – a kingdom that moves against the flow of power and privilege, a kingdom that values solidarity in community over hierarchy, and radical, self-giving love over self-interest. The deeds of the saints matched their words. They didn't set themselves up at the top of the food chain. Glory and status were never part of their agenda. The gleam in their eye when they served someone else taught us that what we believe about God always has a corresponding action that starts and ends in a love beyond comprehension. When power, pride, and prestige tempt, God's people choose another way. Humility, integrity, service, and solidarity announce the ways of the reign of God.

And we are so, so very thankful for each and every faithful servant of God.

Prayer of confession

Jesus, teacher and Lord, when we hear your criticism of the behaviour of the scribes and the Pharisees in the gospel today, we wonder what has changed. People still place unwarranted burdens on others, still demand preferential treatment, still abuse positions of leadership. We are ashamed to confess that this does not only happen in society at large, it happens also within the church.

When we take part in practices which inflate our egos at the expense of others.
Jesus, forgive us

When we parade our piety and expect favoured treatment, forgetting that you emptied yourself of power so that you could be the servant and Saviour of all,
Jesus, forgive us

When we care more for impressive outward appearances rather than inner dispositions shaped by tolerance and love,
Jesus, forgive us.

If our behaviour is ever experienced or perceived as hypocritical,
Jesus, forgive us

Renew and refresh us with your gentle and selfless Spirit, Lord, so that we know what it is to be your followers not only in name, but in reality. Amen.

(Maira Laidlaw)

Prayer of dedication for offering

Holy God, we offer these gifts and our lives, not for the sake of their appearance, but in gratitude for all you have given to us. Above all, we thank you for Jesus, for his selflessness and sacrificial love. May our discipleship possess these same qualities. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Song – Beauty for Brokenness (Tis 690)

Beauty for brokenness
Hope for despair
Lord, in your suffering
This is our prayer
Bread for the children
Justice, joy, peace
Sunrise to sunset
Your kingdom increase!

Shelter for fragile lives
Cures for their ills
Work for the craftsman
Trade for their skills
Land for the dispossessed
Rights for the weak
Voices to plead the cause
Of those who can't speak.

*God of the poor
Friend of the weak
Give us compassion we pray
Melt our cold hearts
Let tears fall like rain
Come, change our love
From a spark to a flame.*

Refuge from cruel wars
Havens from fear
Cities for sanctuary
Freedoms to share
Peace to the killing-fields
Scorched earth to green
Christ for the bitterness
His cross for the pain.

Rest for the ravaged earth
Oceans and streams
Plundered and poisoned
Our future, our dreams
Lord, end our madness
Carelessness, greed
Make us content with
The things that we need

God of the poor...

Lighten our darkness
Breathe on this flame
Until your justice
Burns brightly again
Until the nations
Learn of your ways
Seek your salvation
And bring you their praise

God of the poor...

(Graham Kendrick)

Prayer for Others (Michele Broad)

Our Father, Hallowed be your name.
You gift us the Church,
That fragile communion of faith, made of each of us...
All of us broken and flawed who seek to be your people.
Doing what we can as we join in with your work of bringing the Kingdom into being.
We are grateful for our brothers and sisters in Christ and the encouragement and family
that gives us.
May we live well in faith and bring the Kingdom, as we are called.

Hallowed be all saints.
We are grateful for those saints who came long before us,
Who sought to do their best,
Living their faith,
Sharing their beliefs
Being disciples as they felt called.
We live with and in their legacy,
The good and the bad
We are grateful and thankful
May we live well in faith and bring the Kingdom as we are called.

Hallowed be all saints.
We are grateful for those who came before us, but with whom we share this time.
Those who formed and continue to form us in faith. Those who discipled us to call out our
gifts and led us into ministry.
We are thankful for the space they made for us so that we might find our place in your
people.
We are thankful for their grace and their generosity, their faithfulness to you and to the
Church.
They are an important part of our story and we remember those gathered with us today
and those who have now left us but are held lovingly in our memories for their legacy to
us.
May we live well in faith and bring your Kingdom as we are called.

Hallowed be all saints.
We are grateful and pray for the saints of tomorrow who will receive your legacy and who
will in turn build your church with new vision and new inspiration.
We are grateful for young people in the church and the privilege of their presence.

We pray for them to know the fullness of your love for them Father God and how precious they are.

We pray that they may know the churches joy in them,

And in turn we ask Lord God, that there will be support and guidance, love and acceptance for them, and a finding of their place in your church.

May we live well in faith and bring your Kingdom as we are called.

Hallowed be your name

Abundant God, we know your Church is more than that bounded by four walls.

Your church is where you are present... and where saints respond to your presence and all that you are doing in the world.

In the strife of Israel and Palestine be with those who tend and care for the injured, those who support distressed families, those made homeless and those who strive to assist them. Be with the decision makers who hold the life of all the innocents in their hands...to bring wisdom and hope into this conflict.

In Afghanistan, be with those who bravely risk all to fight for justice for women, who fight for education for girls. Be with those suffering from conflict, drought, extreme poverty, natural disasters and food insecurity. We pray for those agencies who work for change. We hold them in prayer.

In Australia, we pray for wisdom and change in managing Domestic Violence. We pray for those struggling in distressed home environments and for support workers engaged in face-to-face assistance. We hold them in prayer.

We pray for families in financial hardship, for homeless and those fearing they are nearing the brink. We pray for your wisdom in economic management and social justice in our priorities.

We continue to hold Indigenous communities and leaders in prayer that they may be able to find a way forward.

Guide us Father God in bringing your kingdom into deeper being.

Lead us into holiness.

With gratitude and hope in You, God of All, we pray.

Amen

Song – Take my Life (Tis 599)

Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise,

Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.

Take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee,.

Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.

Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,

Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose,

Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne,

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

(Frances R Havergal)

Blessing

Go into the world, blessed by
the guidance of God
the humility of Jesus Christ
the passion of the Holy Spirit

Rev Janice Freeston
5 November 2023