

All Saints

It would seem that God's people have always been a strange bunch.

Many a saint in days gone by seems to have inflicted terrible harm on their own bodies in an attempt to overcome temptation.

One, spent many years sat on top of a pillar.

The great saints of the bible were often far from perfect.

Abraham was deceitful, passing off Sarah as his sister,
Jacob was a thief, stealing his brother's blessing,
Moses was a murderer,
Samson had a lust problem,
King David was an adulterer.
And Soloman had a thing for the ladies too!
Elijah was prone to depression,
Jeremiah did very odd things, like burying his underpants as a sign.

And in the New Testament:

Peter acted before he thought,
James and John had firey tempers,
Thomas doubted,
Judas was a thief and betrayer,
Paul had a 'thorn in his flesh' and
Timothy was timid and suffered poor health.

So, why then do we celebrate the lives of this mixed bag of "Saints"? Wouldn't we be better simply to focus on Jesus?

Well, we surely find the answer in the Common Worship introduction to the season of All Saints:

"No Christian is solitary. Through baptism we become members one of another in Christ."

In other words, all Christians, young and old, living and dead, are part of one big family – we are brothers and sisters (and like all families some members are more quirky than others).

And again from the Common Worship introduction,

"All Saints Day celebrates men and women in whose lives the Church as a whole has seen the grace of God powerfully at work... it is a time to be encouraged by the example of the saints."

i.e. God was at work in this rather strange bunch of people we call “The Saints” and as he worked in and through them, so he can through us too!

And the fact that God is able to work through even the strangest of people, well that’s well worth celebrating!

And it’s well worth praying that he will do the same in us.

Now, this morning, I wanted to comment on three aspects of our life together as God’s people; about our “through baptism, becoming members one of another”.

I’ll deal with the more difficult one first: our All Age Worship on the first Sunday of the month.

I know that some people found the last All Age worship in Eynsford a little bit difficult.

Church was full – how wonderful! – but there was quite lot of background noise and the sound system wasn’t working properly.

The Benefice Council have thought quite carefully about this.

We plan to start a new service on a third Sunday in the afternoon at Farningham aimed especially at parents and children. This service will be very child friendly (although all ages will be most welcome).

That being said, it is essential that we maintain at least one occasion each month when we can all be together as God’s family – as saints aged 6 months and saints aged 100!

On 17th November we are holding an evening for those of us who are parents of younger children to help us explore your child’s spirituality. As part of this we will talk about how parents can help their children make the most of church.

There are a few simple things that we can do as parents that should help our children get more out of the service and to be slightly quieter!

We’ll also produce a leaflet to give to all parents bringing children to church with some practical advice – children need to be taught how to behave in church as they do in all other areas of life.

On a very practical note, we will endeavour to fix the sound system and work on where people stand to lead the service, so we can all see and hear what’s going on.

For those of us who aren’t parents, I wanted to urge love and patience.

St Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4.4-6 that,

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.”

And so in view of this all being in it together, he says,

“lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.” (Ephesians 4.2).

It's not easy bringing kids to church, and for a parent already anxious about how their child is going to behave, one tut or even frown, can be enough to put them off for good.

In the last month, there have been two instances where mothers have spoken to me, feeling that they and their children are not welcome in church and that they feel it is better if they don't come!

If I'm bring honest, I don't find All Age Worship easy.

But it is important enough for me to stick at – and I hope that what I lose out on through noise and distraction I gain from in being able to help families and children take up their place in God's family – after all, it's only once a month and having made the effort here at 9.30am I can always go off to Lullingstone afterwards for some peace and reflection!!

At other services too, we need to make sure people who have small children can come and take part. I would suggest that once children are of school age, they should be in Sunday school or sat with their parents in the pews taking part. The children's area should be for pre-school children.

The second comment I would like to make about our life together is about my delight at the commissioning (and re-commissioning) that is going to take place in a few moments.

Saint Gillian Hill, our Pastoral Assistant has been busy running a Caring Concerns course and existing and potential new members of the Pastoral team have been learning more about the vital Christian work of the pastoral care of others.

Saint Marjory Robinson and Saint Mel Baker are today joining the Pastoral Team at Church.

Of course, we are all called by God to care for one another and encourage each other in our faith, in good times and bad – but some of us, thankfully, have particular callings in this area and today we reaffirm their work and pray for them in it.

We are doing the same for members of the healing team, who offer to pray for people at each of our 9.30am services.

The third aspect of our life together I would like to comment on is the stewardship campaign we are running in January.

I'd be lying if I said the campaign wasn't in part about money. Certainly St Martin's and St Peter & St Paul are running at a hefty loss, and this isn't sustainable – if we are going to maintain a Christian Church in these villages we are going to have to think seriously about our giving to it.

However, the stewardship campaign is about so much more than just money.

Stewardship is about recognising that all that we are and have is a gift from God, and we are beholden to make the most of our time and talents in the service of our God.

As part of the stewardship campaign you will be asked to review how you use your time and talents in God's service – at home, at work, in the community, and particularly at Church.

I hope that as a result of the campaign many more of us will discover how we can contribute to God's work in our churches and communities – the work of the saints.

In Conclusion...

Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that being a saint is about being good.

Maybe!

But I think that much more important is having a go at doing things out of love for God and in the service of others.

Saints are not perfect (even the ones in the Bible!) but they have a go, and when they fail, ask God's forgiveness and try again; in the faith that God is at work in them and can use them, despite their failings.

Let me conclude by reading the words of St Paul in Colossians 1.9-14:

“For this reason, since the day we heard it we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share the inheritance of the saints in light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”