

## Saints, heretics and misfits

[Revelation 7:9-17](#)

[1 John 3:1-3](#)

[Matthew 5:1-12](#)

Good morning saints of God! Today, All Saints Day, is the day that we remember those who have gone before us in the reign of God – those who have formed us and made us who we are – those who have taught us and those who have shown us how to follow Jesus. And the astonishing thing is that, in the mystical communion of saints, although they are physically gone from us they are present with us whenever we worship God. I'm not talking about ghosts or disembodied entities, I'm saying that when we worship, the doors of heaven are opened and we participate in the worship of the saints. We are part of that great multitude the John saw, that "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands."

In this time of anxiety before the election, I think it is helpful to remember some of the eternal realities, the eternal realities which are ours now and will be fully realized in the future at the end of time. We are enrolled in the reign of God because God loves us and we have responded to God's love. We are participants in the body of Christ which is the demonstration of God's love in the world. We can rest secure in the knowledge that nothing, nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.

As we heard in the second reading, from the first epistle of John, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure."

"All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." Our hope that when all is revealed we will be found like Christ is what draws us forward on the spiritual path, inspiring our pilgrim journey. And we get to participate in that process of sanctification. Sanctification is what happens when we are reconciled to God and are working with the Holy Spirit in the process of discipleship to become more Christ-like. Of course we still sin, we still realize ways that we are implicated in the great sins of our generation – racism, destruction of the planet, high capitalism, the cultivation of hatred. But God has taken care of that – that's what the cross is about – we can still live a life of reconciliation with God and one another in which we acknowledge our sin and our participation in the sin matrix while becoming sanctified – while becoming the saints that we are.

Last week in her talk about stewardship, Cathy Gildae referenced the way geese fly in formation so that the one at the front does more work for a while and then they change places allowing another to lead. There is another amazing thing that birds do in the air – you have seen great flocks which seem to suddenly turn on a dime and move as one in a different direction – that movement is not organized from the front or from an acknowledged leader. That movement

comes from one bird on the edge. One bird which changes direction and every other bird immediately adjusts. The power to move the flock lies with one bird on the edge who may see a predator or an opportunity or simply feel like flying south instead of south east.

I mention this because many of us here at St. Ben's feel like we're on the edge of the crowd, outsiders in some kind of way. Many of you have confided in me that you think you're secretly a heretic, that you can't take the Bible literally or perhaps even seriously, or that you don't really fit in for some other reason. In fact, I've wondered about saying on our publicity material "St Ben's – the church for heretics and misfits"!

But many of the saints were also oddballs. For example, Simeon the Stylite lived on a small platform on the top of a pillar for 37 years; and Joan of Arc led the French army when she was only a teenager; Francis is said to have ripped off his clothes in a courtroom; and most of the traditional saints had visions which today we would consider to be signs of mental illness.

The communion of saints is not a club for nice people. It is the community that lives on the edge. It is the community which follows the teaching of a wildly popular preacher who become wildly unpopular because he followed the dictates of God, not the religious or political leaders.

Which brings me to the so-called Beatitudes which form this morning's gospel; a succinct statement of what it means to be the followers of Jesus. Just compare a few of these with the messages we get from our culture:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

These are not the words of our politicians. These are not the words of the media. These are not the words of Netflix or HBO. These are the words of a misfit who lived and died on the edge. (But who also rose again in triumph over the sin matrix and all who would hold him down.)

People have said that Jesus never meant us to actually live these precepts – that they are impossible to live by and were part of his vision for the end times. But I disagree. These are the basis for becoming Christ-like. These are foundational for our process of becoming sanctified, of becoming Christ-like, of becoming the saints that we are.

And so this is what we get to do today. When the world around us is going crazy, when hatred flourishes in many guises, when the dying patriarchy lashes out with all its anger, we get to practice. We get to practice the Beatitudes. We get to hold on to our crazy vision of a world where all are treated with respect, a world where we have reduced global warming and there is enough food and water for everyone. Even though we feel like a marginal group, people on the edge of society, like that bird who moves the flock, we can have a bigger influence than we imagine.

Because we are the saints of God. We are embedded in God's love. And from that place we can have serenity even as the world erupts around us. And from that place we can persist in loving and forgiving. For that is the way of Jesus.

And that is the way of the saints of God.