



**Sermon preached by Revd Nigel Uden on Sunday 1 November 2020**

**Readings: Revelation 7.9-17; I John 3.1-3; Matthew 5.1-12**

All Saints Day matters to me.

Yes, there are some ordinary people whose lives have mirrored to me something of Jesus' story. I think of Jed, a man who was socially gauche and in almost every way unsophisticated, tied to his mother's apron strings well into his fifties, and lost when she died, but who was used gently and persistently to beckon me into ministry. And of Hazel, the Chinese woman displaced by South Africa's Group Areas Act who gave herself to build a new Congregational Church next to the mine dump to which she and her so-called Coloured community were forcibly relocated, always singing, *It is well with my soul*. On All Saints Day I *do* want to remember them, and many others, ever so gratefully.

But All Saints Day matters to me even more for a different reason, and it's that first letter of John which sums up why. You see, the writer helps us understand what saints are. Saint is not a euphemism for do-gooder. Saints are neither more, nor less than children of God. John tells us that that's what the gift of God's love is all about. It adopts us as once and for all God's children.

It's so easy for us to fall into the belief that we become saints by doing the sort of thing that pleases God. But no, we cannot do anything that could achieve that. Moreover, the Christian faith offers us the delicious truth that we do not need to. Just like a child is born of its parents' love – that's what make it a child – so we are born of God's love. As our Anglican kinsfolk have it, 'Redemption is a work of God's grace: it is God who redeems us in Christ and there is nothing to be done beyond what Christ has done.'

In verse two, our writer accentuates the immediacy and intimacy of this. 'Beloved', it says, 'we are God's children now.' This is no cold philosophical speculation about something that might happen at some point in the future. You and me being children of God is the supreme gift of God's love for our here and now. All Saints Day surely has to begin with a celebration of that. At a time of global pandemic challenge and economic uncertainty, or maybe this is for you a season of personal difficulty, perhaps even tragedy, it is worth resting in this promise. 'Beloved, we are God's children now.'

And it's not only for now. There are promises for the future, the detail of which has not been revealed, but if we are beloved children now, can we not live by trusting hope for what is to be, even that beyond this life, where that love remains undefeated and everlasting?

Of course, like the children of any parents, children of God, are called to *do* things. I was hearing only this week of a family where all the children had a very clear rota of weekly responsibilities. It's part of the gift of being a child, to take our place at the

heart of the parents' lives. And so it is for children of God: we take our place in the Body of Christ, not passively but in passionate and grateful response for what we've been given, running with perseverance the race that is set before us.

How famously Jesus sums that up in those Beatitudes Pippa just read for us. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' To be a child of God now – November 2020 – is to make peace: peace where there is the trauma of coronavirus suffering, peace where there is the fractiousness caused by stress and worry; peace wherever we are and with whomsoever life has set us at home or workplace, in neighbourhood or faith community.

But being a child of God today is also to live with the glorious hope of receiving the unfading crown of glory when we stand before God's throne of grace – God's children not because of any works of our own but because we're beloved, now and always. Let it be so, and let us pray in the words of St John Henry Newman.

*Lord, support us by your grace through all the hours of life's day: until the shadows lengthen, the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our own evening comes. Then, Lord, in your mercy, grant us safe lodging, a holy rest and peace at the last, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*