

Collect, Readings and Reflection for 01 November 2020, All Saints'

Collect (*the Church's prayer for today*):

God of holiness,
your glory is proclaimed in every age:
as we rejoice in the faith of your saints,
inspire us to follow their example
with boldness and joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Readings: Revelation 7:9-end; Matthew 5:1-12

If you were to ask someone if what they had for breakfast that morning was what they usually had for breakfast, nine times out of ten it would be. We are all creature of habit and we do what we understand to be normal in all different areas of life. That is what makes marriage so interesting, when two people come together and discover the other person isn't normal like they are. This was brought home to me many years ago when here at St James a young vicar called Paul Slater led a course about different personalities – the Myers Briggs course. One exercise was when the 10 or so couples there all stood in a line in no particular order and Paul asked a series of questions. One was – if you have had friends round, and it's late when they leave, do you wash up and tidy before you go to bed or leave it until morning? If you wash up before bed, go one place to the left; if you leave it until morning, go one place to the right. Another was if you need to recharge your batteries, do you spend alone or with a friend? At the end of a dozen or so of these questions I was at one end of the room and my wife was at the other.

But whilst we differ in personality, most of us share similar view about many things - the things we take to be normal. It is better to be rich than poor. It is better to be at the top than at the bottom. It is better to have a quiet life than be persecuted. It is better to be healthy than sick. And so on. These things seem so obvious that when we read the Sermon on the Mount, we find that what Jesus is saying means that we end up at different end of the room to Jesus. His normal is not our normal. Or so it seems.

To make sense of these sayings, we need to take a few steps back. Matthew is painting a picture of Jesus, and the Jewish community reading his gospel would see how Matthew was retelling their story, the story of Israel. But now Matthew is putting Jesus in the central role. Abraham was the father of their faith – a Jesus genealogy goes back Abraham. Israel was rescued from slavery in Egypt and we see Jesus return from Egypt. Moses was given the Law, rules on how to live a godly life on a mountain. And here we see Jesus, also on a mountain, sharing how to live a Godly life. And Matthew then goes on to show how Jesus is a King greater even than King David. In fact Jesus is the King Israel has been longing for and that the promised Kingdom of God is already beginning to break out. Matthew shows how the Kingdom of God was breaking in to normal life in the encounters Jesus has with all sorts of people. Matthew shows the Kingdom of God breaking in to normal life in teaching and miracles of Jesus. But most significantly, Matthew shows the Kingdom of God breaking in to normal life in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That means life can never be the same. The old normal is gone.

Jesus' death and resurrection means that He is with us through the Spirit, we are not alone.

Jesus' death and resurrection means that we are each of us called to see that we are part of seeing God's will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. That our relationship to Jesus speaks into all that we do.

Jesus' death and resurrection means that the Beatitudes speak comfort to us in all our struggles and loss.

Jesus' death and resurrection gives us a meaning and purpose, that futility is gone.

Jesus' death and resurrection means that we have a hope, a hope that is steadfast and certain, that one day all things will be restored.

This is something that this glorious passage from Revelation points to; it is God's promise to us:

"God's people (you and I), will be before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple;

and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd;

He will lead them to springs of living water.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Rev 7 v 9-17)

Amen.