

Sunday 5 November: All Saints' Day

**Gospel of Matthew 5. 1-12
The Revelation to John 7. 9-17**

A Sermon preached by Rev Simon Kim, St David's Church, Chelmer

Everyone wants to be blessed. So, the purpose of life is to find happiness.

Because people live in different circumstances and with different values, the standard of happiness can vary from person to person. But for Christians, true happiness is universally applicable and can be called the total reality of God's salvation.

In his famous book "To Have or to Be?", sociologist Erich Fromm describes two modes of human survival.

The first one is a life centred on possessions: a life devoted to the pursuit of having possessions, knowledge, status, and power. Possessions become the centre of their existence and they fear losing what they have, and because they see people as objects, they become defensive, harsh, and consequently lonely.

The other is a being-centred life. People who live this way see sharing and giving as the most important value of life and live a life of joy and fulfilment. They want a life of togetherness, a life of service, so they bring all beings together. They realise that happiness does not come from what they have, but from what they share, seeing everything as a gift from God.

In today's Sermon on the Mount from Matthew's Gospel, there is a declaration of true happiness. We could say that the eight or nine declarations of happiness that preface the Sermon on the Mount are a picture of Jesus' life. He was poor, 'without even a place to lay his head', he grieved over human misery, he was gentle and merciful, he was pure in heart, and after his resurrection he gave his disciples the gift of true peace. So if we want to be truly happy, we need to be like Jesus and seek God.

In today's Gospel reading, I felt that I needed to focus specifically on the word 'peacemakers'. The 'peacemakers' referred to in Jesus' blessing are people of action, people who actively create peace in places where peace is being destroyed.

Jesus declared that peacemakers would be the children of God. In a way, there has never been a time in human history when there has been true peace - human history has been a history of war, strife and conflict. Paradoxically, it is undeniable that human civilisation has progressed through wars. It is also undeniable that many technologies that were initially developed for military purposes, such as computers, have been applied to our daily lives to provide convenience.

What is clear, however, is that whenever there is a war between nations, or civil war, the people who suffer the most are the children and women who are powerless to protect themselves. Even as we speak, countless women and children are dying, in Ukraine, the land of Palestine, Sudan.

The 'peace' that Jesus spoke of does not simply mean the cessation of war or fighting.

As we already know, the 'peace of God' is the Hebrew word 'shalom', which means not just the absence of war or fighting, but a state of being completely filled up in every way, so that there is no lack; or a state of complete reconciliation, in which all debts owed to each other have been settled; or a state in which all enmity has been forgiven.

The peacemaker is Jesus Christ, Paul said in his letter to the Colossians.

Of course, there have been countries in human history that have officially proclaimed 'peace'. A prime example of this can be found in the Roman Empire, which proclaimed "Pax Romana" two thousand years ago. Now, in the 21st century, it has reappeared as "Pax Americana." In both of these cases, it seems as if peace is achieved by strong military and economic power, and some people are convinced that it is.

But peace made by military and economic power is fake.

According to Christ's hymn in Colossians, Christ has made real peace, not just between people or between nations, but through reconciliation between man and nature, between man and God.

So, Christ is our peace, and it is our Christian duty and task to guard this peace with all our might. If there are forces on many levels that are disturbing this peace, we must resist them: hatred and envy within each individual human being, various diseases, poverty, social injustice, wars between nations based on race, religion, and ideology, and the destruction of nature and ecosystems. As disciples of Jesus, we must stand up to these forces to keep and create peace, for Jesus has 'already' brought that peace to earth, but the kingdom is 'not yet' complete.

We are now in a service celebrating 'All Saints'. Coming from a Korean Presbyterian background, 'All Saints' Day was very unfamiliar to me, but I came to realise its meaning through a retired bishop who was supervisor on a retreat for priestly ordination last March. He told me that 24 March, the day I was ordained, was the celebration day of Archbishop Oscar Romero (who was assassinated in Central America for criticizing government human rights abuses), and we had a lot of conversations about how his footsteps could apply to me today.

However, we know that the kingdom of God has been spread through countless unnamed saints, in addition to the special saints recorded in the Bible and remembered throughout 2,000 years of Christian history.

In today's first reading, Revelation 7.9, we see "a great multitude, so great that no one could number them, from every nation, tribe, people, and language." This scene represents countless unnamed people who have entered the ranks of salvation through Christ Jesus.

And as we honor the glory of all these saints, we celebrate that the saints in heaven are united to us, who live as pilgrims on earth, as members of the same body in the mystery of Christ, our Head.

Brothers and sisters, who are the truly blessed?

Blessed people are those who do not give in to the desires of the world, those who live against the domination of the world, and those who live in the world with new values, new life, and new hope.

In a world without love, a world indifferent to the needy and poor, a world of extreme selfishness, competing like animals in the law of survival of the fittest, a world that believes only in the value of economic efficiency and utility, a world without peace, and where peace has been lost, we must walk the path to sainthood.

Finally, let's ponder these words from St Augustine.

"The saints were men, and I am a man. Then there is hope for me to become a saint."

~~~~~