



Rev Diana Rattray
We sing of the saints
1 John 3:1-3;
Matthew 5:1-12
Year A All Saints Day
Remembrance
5 November 2023

Many of you will know that I was previously the Vicar of All Saints, Ponsonby. So that meant that All Saints' Day was also our Patronal Festival. All Saints Church is currently closed for earthquake strengthening - so we remember them as they celebrate their Patronal Festival in the hall rather than the church. One of the joys of the church in Ponsonby was sitting and praying in the chapel. The chapel was divided from the sanctuary by a wrought iron screen with 108 hand painted mahogany tiles, 54 on each side. The tiles depicted icons and symbols of saints. Some are really familiar and some obscure.

Last Monday I went to the funeral of Margaret Harvey, nee Thompson. She died aged 99 having lived a long and faith-filled life. She was a Fine arts lecturer and an artist. She painted each one of those 108 icons. Now she herself is one of the saints in the community of saints.

Today some of you come here, because it is what you do on a Sunday. Some of you have come because a loved relative or friend has died over the past year, and their funeral was held in this church, some of you may not have known today was All Saints Day until you walked through the doors this morning.

Today we speak of and sing of the saints. The hundreds and hundreds, and thousands and thousands, of faithful people who are now in the communion of all the saints.

Tikanga Maori in the powhiri and pepeha get things very right. Before you get down to the business at hand you remember the dead, you acknowledge their presence in the wharenuī and you remember the legacy of the tipuna, the ancestors.

As we stand in this beautiful church I am so conscious of those who have gone before in this whare karakia, the parishioners, the clergy, men, women and children whose lives, legacy and story are so linked with ours and who we are today.

We remember and acknowledge them. Whether you like it or not, you and I are saints – admittedly not with a capital “s” but still saints. The capital S saints surround us in the beautiful stained glass windows, other saint-like people are remembered with plaques on the walls, others, just as significant and special, have no physical reminder of their work and witness in this whare karakia. You and I are saints, because of who we are on our faith journey and not because of what we have accomplished.

St Matthew's has been in a time of interim ministry since May and now we know this interim time will continue until April 2024. Stepping into change is often stepping into vulnerability. Staying in a liminal space means that the vulnerable state remains in a more noticeable way. Perhaps that is what it means to be a saint. Not to be perfect, or to be different, or pious, or zealous but to be vulnerable and out of that vulnerability to turn to God in need.

All Saints', is the day we remember those we have loved and who have moved to the nearer presence of God in the past year and previous years. Death and grief are one of those things that remind us particularly of our vulnerability and solidarity with others.

No one is exempt from death, loss, or grief.

All Saints' Day invites us to recognise and give thanks for those who were important to us. To name them again, so that in speaking their names they are re-remembered. Those who have returned to dust, caught up in the promise of the God who first created humanity from dust and continues to raise the dead to life in Christ.

Vulnerability names the condition of need and dependence that is often not comfortable and that our culture regularly invites us to imagine that we can and should avoid.

I get frustrated when the media, and others who should know better, use euphemisms for death. I find it difficult when people hold a farewell party, a celebration of life and do not give a space to grieve. A good funeral does both. When death occurs while we celebrate the good times we also need to grieve the death and what that means for us.

While vulnerability is uncomfortable, it is also what makes us human. As Brené Brown in her wonderful TED talk on vulnerability reminds us— when we try to numb those things that are uncomfortable or pose a risk – feelings of sadness, grief, and vulnerability – we also numb our capacity to feel joy, satisfaction, and happiness.

All churches at their best, can be places that remind us that vulnerability is not something to shun or deny and that God has promised to meet us precisely at our points of vulnerability, our points of need, and our points of brokenness, our points of grief and in death.

A concept we hear in the Beatitudes, read as our gospel today. We are reminded of how we are blessed, and what we receive from God. The beatitudes are about how to “be” and what “attitude” to have. They are the opening statements in the Sermon on the Mount, the first of the five main speeches into which Matthew gathered sayings of Jesus.¹

The beatitudes begin with those in need and then those who can help them. They tell of a promised blessing to the merciful, the pure in

¹ <https://billloader.com/MeetingMatthew5712.pdf>

heart, the mourners, the peacemakers, and those who thirst for justice for others.

Mercy, love and compassion is what matters most as we think about those we love, those who are in need.

Mercy, love and compassion for those who mourn here, and those who mourn in Gaza, and Israel, and other places of conflict.

Mercy, love and compassion in our vulnerability and fearfulness in our troubled world.

Mercy, love and compassion as we journey through a further six months of interim ministry.

Mercy love and compassion as we remember, as we grieve and as name the saints and those we love.

Often it is the words of others that offer mercy, love and compassion. Here are some words from poet Mary Oliver:

To live in this world
you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it
against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go.²

As we sing of the saints today, as we remember those we have loved and who have died, as we acknowledge our vulnerability, as we comfort those who mourn, we lift our voice in song.

With vulnerability and joy we sing of all the saints.

Amen.

² <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/not-happy-halloween/comments>