

Memorial Service (28-10-12)

I remember hearing someone talking about caving, saying how you can sometimes suddenly find yourself in a huge lofty underground cavern with the most beautiful rock formations and colours that take your breath away. He went on to talk about how he had suddenly realised that the only way to see these wonders was by struggling through the tight and terrifying passages he'd just squeezed through to get there. The dark parts were part of the amazing experience. It seems to me that our experiences in life are similar?

The 1st of November is All Saints Day. Most people think 'saint' is a special person: wonderful, holy, or a brave martyr. But in the Bible the word 'saint' is a name for anyone who trusts in God. In the New Testament saints are those who either HAVE believed and those who DO believe. And it says the church is made up of two kinds of saints - those who have died in the Christian faith and they're known as the Church Triumphant.

Those still alive in the Church throughout the world are called the Church Militant. These are the saints on earth - still fighting against all that tries to hinder God's Kingdom. Saints in heaven are those who've fought a good fight and are now resting from their labours, They have triumphed gloriously, and heard the voice from the throne saying "Well done, good and faithful servant". The church militant is believers still here.

Some of you may think what a load of gobbledegook? When you're dead, you're dead. There's no church triumphant, just a load of graves, and the memory of all who've gone before. If Jesus didn't rise after he was crucified, I'd have to agree with you. But the resurrection is the foundation belief of the Christian faith. Many people over the last 2,000 years have looked hard at all of the evidence substantiating this belief. Not just Christians: plenty of evidence comes from those who've begun writing books to prove it's all nonsense, that there was no resurrection. On the way their books have changed to become evidence for it (including Jewish lawyers too)!

And the resurrection wasn't just a one-off for Jesus: He said "I go to prepare a place for you, so that where I go, you may come after me and be with me." Jesus quite clearly in this, and other statements, recognises there's something in humans that goes on after death. He even told us

how to get there too – He said 'I am the way'.

So, to become a saint, we have to accept that Jesus was sent from God to show us the way back to God. You don't have to be especially clever with special knowledge, you don't even have to be specially good – what a relief or none of us would make it.

But what you do need is faith in Jesus – faith which helps you follow Him and go His way.

Thinking back to that caving journey then. Part of the glorious life awaiting God's chosen ones in heaven is the challenging and often uncomfortable journey of life on earth towards it. You cannot have one without the other and the expectation of a promised, but unimaginably beautiful, destination can make us happy when we're crawling through life's dark and muddy tunnels. No pain, no gain? The Bible reading we are about to hear is written in the wider context of eternity.

Luke 6:20-26

That reading (the Beatitudes) makes sense in explaining our earthly difficulties. Even these times can show the light of God's love and glory, possibly even give us some cause for rejoicing because they confirm the difficult terrain we encounter 'en route' is all part of our journey towards heaven.

There are many and varied obstacles on the way though and not all of them are about the bad things that happen to us. The world is full of distractions which can take our attention away from God. Things that are lovely and are not wrong in themselves; but if they become too important our spiritual journey gets side-tracked. Sometimes being too busy can mean we forget about God, and where we meant to be going. Sometimes it is the bad things that sidetrack us: failure, personal setbacks, financial worries, illness, bereavement, redundancy or break of a relationship. They are often painful and I'm not suggesting they're easy to overcome, but the journey doesn't end when we encounter them. God will strengthen us and see us safely past them if we put our trust in him.

Often we have periods of doubt on a journey, especially in dark or foggy conditions. We might suddenly think, am I really going the right way? God calls us to trust him, even when we not sure about the next step. He's promised to bring us safely to our destination in heaven if we trust him.

God doesn't want us to make our journey alone – He wants us to trust Him and others who are also on it. Together we can encourage one another and help each other when the obstacles appear. Above all He wants us to trust and journey with Jesus, who made the journey before us and knows all about the barriers we encounter. With him guiding us we know we will reach our destination. Jesus came to show us the way and through His death and resurrection arrive at our place in heaven.

But that requires faith.

In Vancouver there's a big suspension bridge, The Capilano. It spans 450 feet across and is 230 feet above a raging River. The view from the bridge is magnificent but as it sways and creaks, it looks really frail. Actually though, it's strong enough to support the weight of ten military fighter planes. Despite knowing that, stepping out on to it high above the cold fast running river, requires a considerable act of faith! Faith in Christ is like that. You step out into His arms and find He's strong enough to carry you to back to God.

St Paul tells us that absolutely nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are all called to be saints and the church celebrates that on All Saints Day. We're called to trust in the teachings of Jesus and to put our lives in his hands.

It takes all sorts to make up what Desmond Tutu called 'God's Rainbow people'. Those who are the Saints, triumphant in heaven and militant here on earth.

Let's pray that we will allow Him to strengthen us on our journey. **Amen.**