

Sermon – All Saints Sunday – 1 November 2020 – Hannah Fytche

This morning, those of you joining us online will have seen a picture on your screen at the start of the service. Those here in-person will have seen this same picture as they entered the building – it's big, bright, and bold, and quite hard to miss! It was on display yesterday evening, as part of our light display in the church porch, of which you can find pictures on SM – a display created as a way of sharing with those around us the hope we have in the life and light of Jesus Christ, and it's also the reason why there are pumpkin and lanterns in the church porch, all created by our youth groups.

This giant picture has been created by families, young people and youth leaders here at St Andrew's. Each person who wanted to could colour in a tile, a small section of the picture, however they liked – and yesterday afternoon Helen and I put all of these tiles together like a big puzzle. If you coloured a tile in, I wonder if you've been able to spot it in our big poster?!

As well as seeing your own tiles, you will also see that each tile is coloured differently to the next. Some were coloured in completely, no space left; some were filled in with patterns and drawings; others were coloured in a minimalist style, with lots of space around a few carefully chosen colours.

Each tile is different and brilliantly formed by its artist, its colourer. Each individual tile then comes together to form this joined-up, beautiful big picture.

This, I think, is a way that we can think about the church – about God's kingdom here on earth made up of all his saints, all those who follow him.

Today is All Saint's Day, the day on which we remember and celebrate all those who have lived and died in the faith. We'll hear some of their names later in the service. Each of those individuals is like one tile in our big poster, one life lived in God's way that has joined up into one big picture of the kingdom of God.

Each of the saints' lives has come together into one big picture of God's kingdom because they lived lives of trust in God – even when it was hard. Their lives were made holy by God with them as they trusted in him, and that's why we remember their stories today.

We too are called to live lives of trust like the saints. Each of our lives is like a tile that comes together to form a big picture of God's kingdom as we trust in him.

We can learn to live our lives as part of this big picture by trusting in God, even when it is hard. This, I think, is just one way to read the words that we heard from our Gospel reading just now.

These words of Jesus' teaching are words which give us glimpses of his call for us to trust him, even when the tasks and days in front of us are difficult.

You can imagine Jesus saying to his followers:

‘Trust me. Trust me even through grief, and even through your desperate prayers and hard actions of hungering for goodness in a world where so much is lost and so much is unjust. Trust me when you have to show mercy and be kind to an enemy. Trust me as you strive to live a pure life, and as you strive to bring divided people together in peace. Trust me.’

And Jesus gives us specific promises and reasons to trust him:

‘It will be hard – but as you trust me whilst you keep going, you will be comforted. You will be filled. You will inherit the earth, and see who God is, and experience God’s love calling you by name. You will see the kingdom of heaven.’

This is what so many of the saints we remember today found: they found that, as they trusted God and his promises, they could keep going in the hard and good work of following him in a difficult world. Even if those promises weren’t fulfilled for a long time, they were still promises they could trust and be strengthened by.

So, let us find in these promises something strong that we can trust. Let us let these promises encourage us to keep going through hard days. To stretch the metaphor, let’s let God help us to choose the colours with which to colour in our tiles: the colours of trust, of perseverance, of joy through hardship, of love, of light in darkness; the colours of God’s kingdom.

And as we colour, let’s bring our tiles, our lives, together to form one big picture.

We bring our lives together when we gather to worship God and encourage and comfort each other. When we gather, whatever that looks like at the moment, the lives we live individually become a life we live together in Christ.

And when we do live this life together, the big picture that we create is a picture of *hope*, of light shining in darkness, because we are the people who trust God’s promises even through hard days.

Like our big poster, our life together tells the most hopeful and powerful story in the world: the story of Jesus rising to life again even after he died. It tells the brilliant story of God’s love – love which overcame death. Light which overcame darkness. New life rising even from the pain and weariness of loss and change.

It is this trust and hope in Jesus’ resurrection that has kept me going over the last seven months. I have often spent time reading biblical accounts of the resurrected Jesus – Jesus meeting with his disciples after his resurrection, which we find in the Gospels; Jesus seated on the throne in heaven even now and worshipped by all of creation, like we heard from our first reading this morning.

To finish, let me read you some of the words from our first reading. They talk about people from every nation and tribe and tongue who are worshipping God on the throne, in heaven – people who are described as those who have been brought through trial by the blood of the Lamb, given new life by Jesus’ death and resurrection.

In other words, this is a vision and a promise of what life with God will look like when Jesus comes again. These words say:

“they, the people, are 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.

¹⁶ ‘Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.

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

¹⁷ 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.’”

This is the great hope that we hold onto, the unchanging hope of our life in Christ. I encourage you today to spend some time with this hope, learning to trust the promises of Jesus.

To do this, spend time reading stories of the risen Jesus in the Bible. Take a picture of our poster so that you can be reminded visually of where we find our hope. And continue to meet together, online for now, and find, as we meet together and join our many lives into one shared life, that we become a people which will ever speak out that Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again.

Amen.

