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Luke 6.30 -38

Psalm 16

1 John 3.1- 3, 9-10.

May your Word live in us : And bear  
much fruit to your glory.

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On All Saints Day we especially honour all the men and women and children who have committed themselves completely to God, even at the cost of their freedom, or even their lives, and those who honour him today. Most of them are known only to God.

Once upon a time there was a handsome prince who was brought up in a palace, who enjoyed every luxury; everyone in the court bowed down to him wherever he passed, everything he asked for was given him. One day he renounced his inheritance and left the palace to begin a new life as a commoner.

There are many versions of the story – in some, the prince renounces the princely life for something better, as the Buddha is said to have done, in other versions, the prince renounces good for evil, just as Jesus tells us that those who give up on God are being led astray by the devil, in some form.

So, how do we view the latest iteration of the story, in Harry and Meghan?

This story can be seen as an analogy which reconciles two opposing Reformation doctrines about saints and sinners. One view, the Arminian view, is that anyone can turn to God and be saved, become a saint; the opposing view, the Calvinist view, is that God has chosen those who will inherit the kingdom of God. They are the elect.

We can reconcile the two theologies by saying that some of God's elect choose to renounce their inheritance, to reject salvation through Christ, to remain sinners.

..... read one of the Gospel passages suggested for All Saints' Day, part of what is known as Jesus' sermon on the plain. It may seem strange to choose a passage which does not mention saints but does have a lot to say about sinners. But the passage is relevant, because saints and sinners have radically different lifestyles – the saints love and serve everyone, including those who do not love them, expecting nothing in return, not even a sign of God's approval, or riches or even good health. Bad things do happen to good people.

So, who are the sinners? Everyone, including all of us, because we have all fallen short of perfection, and Jesus taught us to be perfect, just as God is perfect. This should be humbling enough, but should we worry about being a sinner? Well, no, if we believe in God's truths and commit to living in his love. By his grace alone, by the sacrifice of his Son, sinners are transformed into saints.

So what are the signs of sainthood? In this sermon Jesus gave us a few. He was not talking about saints as officially recognised by the Catholic church – for that, firstly, you have to be dead, and we know from experience that there are living saints, and each of us is called to be one. John Bell wrote this morning's lovely anthem as a song of grieving, but he has written many songs for and about living saints, alone and with Grahame Maule

Secondly, a canonised saint has to have performed one or two proven miracles, but, in an age of computers and jet planes and modern medicine, healing miracles are no longer such a big deal.

Jesus is talking about saints in everyday life – people who love beyond reason or even common-sense; who give without expecting anything in return; who serve others without wanting them to serve us; who believe the best of everyone, rather than the worst, even amid a flood of gossip; who forgive rudeness and bad treatment, being overlooked or pushed aside, and respond with a blessing.

That's a tall order, and it's especially hard when you are living in a community like a parish family, and, even more so, in an aged person's home, like the two I visited this week, where people have no say about whom they share the dining room or the lounge room or even a bedroom with. It becomes even harder to be all-loving as we grow older, as we lose the self-restraints which protect us when we are younger.

In Jesus' love we can all have what Catholics call the Beatific Vision, the direct experience of God reserved for the saints, beginning in this life and continuing after we pass over to the next. This is the reward the saints receive without asking or expecting -- *a good measure, shaken together, running over*, because when we become saints, nothing we believe and nothing we do seems unusual, even though it's often very different from what comes naturally to other people.

Paradoxically, Jesus tells us that, by expecting no reward, we will receive a great reward for doing the Father's will -- *a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap*. We know that if we are nice to people, people are more likely to be nice to us, but more than that, if we do the Father's will day by day, we become more and more like the Father himself – and rejoice in Him more and more, just as He rejoices in his saints.

This is another story which has been told and re told many times, in many forms. In the lives of the saints, the final journey to be with God. One of the most memorable versions is in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an extended parable written in the later stages of the English Reformation.

John Bunyan writes that as the Pilgrim reaches the end of his earthly journey, he cries, *'My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought His battles, who now will be my rewarder.'*.... *So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.*

As St John writes, *what we will be has not yet been revealed*, but there can be no greater reward than being welcomed into the presence of God, to live for ever with him.