

May these words be pleasing.

The newspaper I picked up on Thursday had a picture of Jeremy Corbyn on the front cover. This week he has been suspended from the party he until recently had led. The lady who served me said, unprompted, 'I can't believe it's taken them so long'. Will history agree? In a hundred years' time will he be judged an idiot, or forgotten, or will his mortal remains be a site of pilgrimage, interred in a London cemetery? Meanwhile voters are going to polls in The States. Many judged "Great" by history were no less divisive in their lifetimes than Trump is today, or may be judged a dangerous fool. Closer to home we have our own leaders, we have Boris, more about him later.

Today is All Saints Day and one part of this is a commemoration of those judged, by the church, to be the great and the good from times past. How well, for example, do we know the church buildings here and around Richmond? There are plenty of St Marys, and Saint Cuthberts (a northern saint), less obvious is the link for all the St Agathas, we have an Andrew a Peter a James and a John, we have Michael (and all angels) and a Paul. Less familiar saints include Francis Xavier, Giles, Anne (the mother of Mary), Felix, Eloy, Romald (as in Romaldkirk), and Edmund (from the church in Marske) and if I asked you where his body lies today you, of course, would say 'Bury Saint Edmund'. Edmund is noteworthy not only for once being the patron 'saint' of England but also the patron saint of kings and pandemics.

If we like our northern saints an unusual possible inclusion is the patron saint one of the ancient Ethiopian churches, one Pontius Pilate. Historians argue for three possible places for his birth one of which is somewhere around Hadrian's wall.

Whilst reminded ourselves of some famous saints on all saints day a reminder that there are far more recent stories of sacrifice and martyrdom you may like the reminders both of old and new one daily offices

(morning prayer, Compline, and others) available on our church of England website. This week we have commemorated Alfred the great, Saint Cedd, Simon & Jude, and James Hannington, Martyr in Uganda in 1885. You are welcome, for example, to your daily deanery compline on zoom at 9 O'clock. There are podcasts on the morning office every Saturday, Sunday and Monday on our website, and on all other days the morning office here in church at 08:30, also available on YouTube. These, alongside our daily prayers and acts of worship such as this, all part of our church family's rhythm of life.

And this brings us to the challenge of our own walk with God. We may wish to avoid thinking too hard about this as we feel somewhat exposed and inadequate. Far easier to tell stories of holy men and sometimes women of times of old. Where do we fit in and where will we fit in with 'all saints'.

Before we look at this I promised another look at the good or the bad or the ugly of today and a tale of Boris. I have met Boris which sounds rather grand but it was on a crowded and hot train and I was standing a few metres away. He had a seat and next to him sat a rather self conscious young Alastair who along with the rest of us was growing increasingly warm especially as he was still wearing his coat. Trying very hard to, without fuss, take his coat off Alastair managed to get it stuck at the elbow, he increased the pressure, thus releasing the elbow suddenly, catching his neighbour full on the nose. You can be the judge whether: saint or sinner?

We need to consider where we stand on all saints, all souls, heaven, life after death and what this means to each of us. We live lives that may seem quite contradictory and illogical. I am likely to be two thirds of the way through my life, I work for money to pay the bills, to save for the demands of the future both known and unknown, I take out insurance to protect me and my family, I worry about my family, my town, and the environment (our planet), even though I will die in only 20, 30 years time, maybe more, maybe

less. I also, of course, believe that this is not the end of my story, I believe in the promise of life eternal, which is not simply more-of-the-same. I believe, we believe, that we will be perfected in Christ sharing with all the angels and saints and the whole company of heaven. I may be in a wooden box brought up an aisle such as this but I will escape this goldfish bowl with all its stresses and strains, anxieties and cruelty. It is a wonderful hope, we share this hope with those who come to us when forced to face the reality of loss and death and they wish to use our building for a funeral: We offer the hope of things unseen, of wonderful things to come. If, however, we have such a great hope then why bother with the stresses and strains and endeavours of this present life within the goldfish bowl? It is a valid question.

One of the most prominent thinkers today on life after death is Bishop Tom Wright, one time bishop of Durham, now lecturer at St Andrew's University. He argues, from scripture, that when we die we go to heaven. We don't have much in the bible to tell us where or what it's like. It is however, only stage one. The dead are kept safe in the loving care of Jesus in a kind of holding room as they and we wait for the end times talked about in Revelation. This is what he calls the after-after-life, or the life after the-life-after-death. Heaven and earth and joined together perfectly restored, through Christ, as God intended, a planet and creation back in its original form of physical perfection. In his letters Saint Paul talks clearly of the physical resurrection bodies that we will receive at the coming of God's perfect kingdom.

We are no longer (therefore) thinking and talking about escaping a goldfish bowl but instead doing everything that can be part of the restoration of God's perfect creation which, yes, means being concerned about matters of the environment but also the demands of justice and peace, righteousness and mercy. We believe and work for God's kingdom to come now, not 'sometime in the future' as part of a funeral plan to ease our feelings of grief.

How do we do this? We are given a helpful guide in today's gospel about the mindset we are to seek to adopt if we are part of the bringing of God's kingdom, the perfecting of his creation as heaven and earth are joined together. We know this guide as the Beatitudes and we are called to walk gently, our lives seasoned in love, walking humbly before God. Those who act as thin places between heaven and earth are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those persecuted for righteousness' sake, those reviled and persecuted facing all kinds of evil on account of Christ. In all these things rejoice and be glad, for our reward is great in the kingdom of God.