

All Saints' Sermon, St Andrew's 2020

"I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands."

May we all be in that number, when the saints go marching in!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.

I believe in the Communion of Saints, we say in the Creed. Part of a preacher's job is to restore our vision of the glory of God - and, at All Saints'tide, to restore our vision of the Communion of Saints.

I can't tell you your vision - I can only tell you mine: personal, of course, as all such visions must be: so, who comes to mind?

Who are you going to see? If I get there, I hope to see (in that vast crowd) my grandparents again, my great-grandparents who I never knew; of course, now, my mother; John Hall, who brought me to this church; my best man - St Thomas More prayed with his family "may we merrily meet in heaven", and *that* meeting would be merry! I'm remembering some individuals whom particular people especially long to see again, and have some idea how joyous such meeting might be...

I'd hope to see the former ministers of this church; Dr Wishart, restored in post here along with the King after the Civil War; the first ones whose names we know, William Hydewyne and Bartram Cowghram, from the 14th century, and their congregations here, and those who gave us our silver, our glass, our bells, but so few names we know - the whole community here throughout history;

I'd hope to see the musicians; perhaps they might even make room for me at the back somewhere! Parry, Stanford, Elgar, Byrd, Tallis, Bach, Mozart, Haydn: those whose greatest glory is to sing God's praise, and who will then be where they can lead us all in that forever; and now, of course Stanley, who taught us so much here;

Our national church leaders, William Temple, Michael and David Ramsey, our saints and martyrs, blessed John Ingram, the people from our Altar, those who built our church and nation; Cuthbert, Aidan, Bede, Hilda - so many whose names today must stand shorthand for the rest;

I'd hope to see so many who've inspired me from across the globe - I have no idea how we'd all understand each other, perhaps we'll all talk Latin; or how we'll find each other, all dressed the same; perhaps we'll all just *know*. To see the Desert Fathers, these tough men seeking perfection in spirituality; St John Climacus, abbot of Sinai, who wrote of spiritual development with such humility and humour, he must have helped half the world, mostly in the East; And to see the fishermen, back together again - our own St Andrew at last, from whom we've taken our title in these days of our pilgrimage on earth; so many to see - the vast army of St Andrew's down the centuries, here and across the world; our families, musicians, poets, our Kings and Queens - what a meeting that will be! How we'll get round all these different groups, we'll need eternity to just catch up...

But we're not just there for each other; we'll all be there (DV!) because we meet, there as here, then as now, to worship; with St Paul, with St John, with Archbishop Cranmer, Richard Hooker and

all the rest; to cast our crowns before Almighty God, to see Christ face to face at long, long last, lost in wonder, love and praise - for time, space, language and connection will surely then be changed beyond anything we can imagine: Archbishop Ramsey rightly said that saints are not sources of light, but reflect it for us because they are turned towards the source of all light.

There is a temptation, as in football, so with the Saints! To focus on the “Premier League”, the “big names”, Saints with a capital S. But our Communion of Saints perhaps needs to encompass that broader vision of all who have inspired us and cheered us on our way. As St Paul wrote for our encouragement: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Messiah restored Handel’s vision of the glory of God:

”And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our God, and of His Christ. Blessing, and honour, glory and pow’r be unto Him, be unto Him, that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb. for ever and ever.” *In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.*

Malcolm Toft