**Sermon on All Saints Day 31st October 2021 by Rev’d Graham Phillips**

Revelation 21.1-6a

John 11.32-44

Today we celebrate All Saints. It is a time for remembering those people who have had an influence on our faith journey, those spiritual giants, past and present who through the grace of God have made an impact in the world, left their mark on the world. But what is a Saint? What defines a Saint? The bible is full of people who inspire us with their faithfulness and trust in God, but sometimes things are not as they first seem. J John and Mark Stibbe in their book “A box of delights”, have printed a confidential report on biblical candidates being considered for the ministry. It runs as follows:

Noah: a former pastorate of 120 years with not even one convert. Prone to unrealistic building projects.

Joseph: a big thinker, but a braggart; believes in dream interpreting, and has a prison record.

Moses: A modest and meek man, but poor communicator, even stuttering at times. Sometimes blows his top and acts rashly. Some say he left an earlier church over a murder charge.

David: the most promising leader of all until we discovered the affair he had with his neighbour’s wife.

Solomon: great preacher but our parsonage would never hold all those wives.

Elijah: prone to depression. Collapses under pressure.

Elisha: reported to have lived with a single widow while at his former church.

Hosea: A tender and loving Pastor but our people could never handle his wife’s occupation. (God had commanded him to marry a prostitute).

Jeremiah: emotionally unstable, alarmist, negative, always lamenting things, reported to have taken a long trip to bury his underwear on the bank of a foreign river.

Isaiah: on the fringe? Claims to have seen angels in church. Has trouble with his language.

Melchizedek: Great credentials at current workplace, but where does this guy come from? No information in his CV about former work records. Every line about parents was left blank and he refused to supply a birthdate.

John: says he is a Baptist, but definitely doesn’t dress like one. Has slept in the outdoors for months on end, has a weird diet, and provokes denominational leaders.

This list finishes with the statement: God doesn’t call the equipped, he equips the called.

So what about our own Saints after which our churches are named within this Benefice? Well sadly there is no record of St Ruthen. There is a town called Rüthen in Germany, 22 miles south west of Paderborn, which was first recorded in 1072. It flourished well in the late Middle Ages, but fell into decline after that. Like many of its neighbours it focussed on witch trials and from 1573 to 1660, 104 people were tried as witches and wizards, at least 79 being sentenced to death. Not a promising place to build our church’s reputation upon.

There is a village called Ruthin in Denbighshire in Wales. The name comes from the Welsh *rhudd* (red) and *din*(fort), after the colour of sandstone bedrock, from which the town’s castle was built in 1277–1284. It had periods of peace and dispute leading to violence -  the whole town except for the castle, was burnt to the ground on 16 September 1400, by a man called Owain Glyndŵr who led the biggest and last rebellion of Wales against the English. Again not a promising focus for a church looking to name itself after. So sadly we have to say that we do not know the St Ruthen after which Longden Church is named.

For St Edith there are a number of choices, and i have chosen one who may not be the most likely but whose story I liked. Saint Edith of Wilton lived in the 10th century (c. 963 - 16 September 984-987) an English nun, daughter of Edgar the Peaceful, king of England (r. 959–975) by a noble woman, Wilfrida, who he abducted from the nunnery at Wilton Abbey. The records indicate that though Wilfrida returned to the nunnery with Edith, she remained on good terms with King Edgar.

Edith was educated by the nuns and although her mother became the abbess she did not obey the dress code. Instead of dressing in white, she liked to dress magnificently and when challenged on this replied "Pride may exist under the garb of wretchedness; and a mind may be as pure under these vestments as under your tattered furs". Despite this extravagance she was celebrated for her learning, her beauty, and her sanctity. She built a church at Wilton but died 3 weeks after it’s dedication at the age of 21.

Minor miracles were reported shortly after her death, including appearing to her mother in glory. Thirteen years after her death Edith appeared in visions to various people to inform them that her body was uncorrupted in the grave. Her body was exhumed and reburied and her thumb was enshrined separately and became an important relic. King Canute venerated her and during a storm at sea, fearing for his life he appealed to Edith and the storm calmed. Following this and other miracles she became a National saint and a total of 21 churches bear her name.

St Thomas is obviously named after Jesus’s disciple Thomas, who unfairly has the title doubting Thomas, due to his unwillingness to believe in the resurrection of Jesus until he could place his hand in the nail holes in Jesus’s hands and the spear hole in his side. He had obviously been deeply impacted by the death of Jesus and on meeting the risen Christ declared him as My Lord and my God. He went on to found the church in India where he was martyred in 72 AD.

Christ Church is obviously named after Jesus himself.

So we have an unknown St Ruthen, a self willed yet saintly St Edith and a doubting faithful Thomas who throws his whole self into serving Christ. You may think this is not a promising group. The reality is that none of us are perfect yet Christ still calls us, still trusts us with the precious gifts of the kingdom of God.

What comes out of this and is shown in our bible readings is the generosity of Christ. He chooses ordinary people, like you and me, and fills us with his grace, working in and through us, answering our prayers and blessing us. It is Christ himself who sanctifies us, removes our sin, makes us holy, fills us with Holy Spirit. It is Christ who encourages us to pray, to seek miracles, who provides the power and authority that leads to answered prayers.

So today on this All Saints Day, spend a moment reflecting on the Saints past and present, who Christ has called to holiness. Spend time reflecting on Christ’s call on your life. His call to be yourself, to know him and God the father, to live in the wonder of the relationship with God. Let this wonder fill you and enthuse you and take you deeper into Christ.

Amen.

Rev’d Graham Phillips