

CIRCUIT SERVICE FOR 6 NOVEMBER 2022

Rev. David Jenkins

Call to Worship-Today is the nearest Sunday to All Saints Day and our theme is remembering with gratitude people who have inspired us, and looking forward to what the future may hold.

In our first hymn we remember people we have known who continue to act as an example and inspiration to us.

Hymn 745 Singing the Faith (814 Hymns and Psalms) "For all the saints"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7y-yvL2P_FY

For all the saints, who from their labours rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might;
Thou, Lord, their captain in the well fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness still their one true Light.

Alleluia, Alleluia!

O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
And win with them the victor's crown of gold.

Alleluia, Alleluia!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.

Alleluia, Alleluia!

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave, again, and arms are strong.

Alleluia, Alleluia!

The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest;
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest.

Alleluia, Alleluia!

But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of glory passes on His way.

Alleluia, Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:

Alleluia, Alleluia!

(William Walsham How 1823-1867)

Prayer

We praise you for all your saints, through whose lives we have been enriched.

We remember with gratitude how the lives and writings of people through the ages have helped to shape and guide our own lives.

We thank you for your work of grace in people we have been privileged to meet, and in whose quality of life we have found inspiration.

Work in our lives and in the lives of those we meet, that we may more and more realise the potential of your goodness within and among us.

Help us in working together with all people of goodwill and with you, our Creator, for the transformation of this planet and its people. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

All-Age Talk- "Unexpected Treasures"

Some of the most exciting stories are about people searching for treasure-which might be hidden in caves, or buried on islands, or carefully concealed, waiting to be discovered.

Sometimes unexpected finds are discovered by children.

12 year old Mary Anning found a fossil of an ichthyosaur near Lyme Regis.

More recently a 4 year old girl, Lily, found a dinosaur footprint in South Wales and a 4 year old boy, Wiley, found dinosaur bones in Texas.

When we're looking around, who knows what we may discover?

One of the National Trust properties in our Circuit's vicinity is The Vyne and one of its exhibits is a Roman ring. The guide in that room may tell you that it was that ring which inspired Tolkien to write his novel "Lord of the Rings".

Stately Homes have lots of treasures in them-but other people's homes can be very interesting too and may contain objects which have value for the people who own them.

Perhaps your home does? Perhaps you have special treasures you particularly value?

Jesus spoke about treasure-hidden in a field; or a precious pearl discovered by a merchant. Jesus said that where our treasure is our heart is-what we value most is at the heart of our life. And that may not be anything you can see at all. We can't see love and trust and joy shared between people. We can't see the faith that marks out our relationship with God. The greatest treasures in human life are not paintings and sculptures worth millions of pounds, . special as they may be. The hidden, intangible qualities of life are more valuable still.

When we move on into the next life-the life of the world to come-we won't be able to take anything with us except the qualities that have been forming within us, the treasures that belong to eternity.

Hymn 492 Singing the Faith (709 Hymns and Psalms) "Christ be my leader"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cg1y4sWLW8A>

Christ be my leader by night as by day;
safe through the darkness, for he is the way.
Gladly I follow, my future his care,
darkness is daylight when Jesus is there.

Christ be my teacher in age as in youth,
drifting or doubting, for he is the truth.
Grant me to trust him; though shifting as sand,
doubt cannot daunt me; in Jesus I stand.

Christ be my Saviour in calm as in strife;
death cannot hold me, for he is the life.
Nor darkness nor doubting nor sin and its stain
can touch my salvation; with Jesus I reign.
(Timothy Dudley-Smith b 1926)

Readers -

John 14:1-6

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe^[a] in God, believe also in me. ² In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?^[b] ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to the place where I am going.^[c] ⁵ Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶ Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Ephesians 1:11-14

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,^[a] having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this^[b] is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice,^[a] even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷ so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Although you have not seen^[b] him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Our next hymn has the line "Change and decay in all around I see". There are certainly things that don't last; so what does last? Where should we be putting our trust and our energy?

Hymn 141 Singing the Faith (665 Hymns and Psalms) "Abide with me"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnCFsYGaL3U>

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

I need Thy presence every passing hour.
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me

(Henry Frances Lyte 1793-1847)

Sermon "Our Inheritance"

Can you imagine what it would feel like to wake up one day and to learn that you had inherited a great stately home? Can you imagine the delight of walking around its spacious and carefully laid-out grounds with its lakes and fountains, its neatly clipped hedges and rows of trees? Can you imagine exploring the great house itself with its magnificent rooms and pictures and sculptures and furniture? Can you imagine realising that all of this belongs to you?

Even in a much smaller way to come into an inheritance because someone left you some money in their will brings a feeling of pleasure and may open up new opportunities.

Can you imagine what it was like for the first Christians, many of whom were disinherited slaves, to hear Peter's ringing assertion that they had been given new birth into a living hope, into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for them?

This inheritance is much greater than inheriting money in a will, or even inheriting a stately home, because it can never perish or spoil or wither. Money does not keep its value; useful as it is, it is incapable of securing those things which are of the very essence of life. You can be financially poor but rich in relationships. You can be very well off in material terms but poverty-stricken in your friendships. All the money in the world cannot buy the wealth of well-being that right relationships with God and with other people can bring.

Some of the people who own stately homes say that life is not always a bed of roses. What with taxes, property costs, cleaning, gardening, security, insurance, preserving valuables, and lack of privacy if you have to let the public tramp round your home to pay your bills, perhaps owning a stately home is not as much fun as it first seemed.

Peter is talking about something to look forward to in the future.

Often this kind of Christian hope has been scorned, described as pie in the sky when you die, rather than pie here and now.

It is often assumed that Christianity has nothing to say about enjoying life now, about alleviating social misery now; that it just concentrates on hopes deferred to an indefinite future. It puts off seeking justice now with pious platitudes about how things will be sorted out one day.

That isn't how it is. The Christian Gospel has a great deal to offer in terms of enjoying life now and with the passionate pursuit of justice.

Actually, if anything, rather than 21st Century Christians being too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use, it's probably the reverse. We concentrate so fully upon the present as to neglect future hope. We focus so much on confronting the evils and sufferings of our time that what we are offering to people is denuded of any future dimension, and lacks a fundamental, well-grounded hopefulness.

Of course we must concentrate on the here and now, but not at the expense of abandoning a much more expansive and extensive vision of the future. It is the sharing of that future hope that can help to drive and inform our compassion and efforts in the present.

The prospect of an inheritance which will not perish, spoil or fade can be every bit as life-giving for people now as it was in the beginning of the Christian movement.

We live in a world of physical decay, moral corruption and environmental destruction, in which nothing-buildings, values, natural resources-can be regarded as permanent.

So doesn't it mean anything to us that the vast creative energies of our loving Creator holds out to us a cast-iron guarantee of permanence and delight? Doesn't it affect the way we view life and death now that the best qualities of our lives are not destined for the rubbish heap but are capable of surviving death?

We have seen so many things perish and spoil and fade. We have seen so many people removed from our lives. We have endured so many disappointments that we might find it hard to believe that there could ever be qualities of goodness and love that can persist and last forever.

But this is the living hope of Christian people across the world and through the ages. Its surest sign is the resurrection of Jesus. Nothing can separate us from his love. Nothing can destroy the surpassing peace, nothing can remove the utter joy, nothing can besmirch the objective goodness that are God's gifts to humanity. Such convictions can lead us to live fully now, redoubling our efforts of working with God for the coming of God's Kingdom seeking justice, pursuing peace, preserving our planet.

We have already inherited the great gift of life in this beautiful world. A greater, unspoilt and lasting inheritance for all humanity is the hope that sustains and inspires our everyday energies now.

Prayers-In the silence let us make our own response to what we have heard.....

Sustained by hope for the future we offer our prayers for the present-

We pray for peace in every place in which there is war..

We pray for adequate food supplies in every place in which there is hunger...

We pray for freedom in every place in which there is tyranny...

We pray for wisdom in every place where life is ruined by foolishness..

We pray for our nation...

and for the nations of our world...

As we approach COP27 this month we pray that the voices of smaller and less powerful nations will be heard; that the richer countries will be generous in mitigating the financial consequences of vast pollution and the effects of climate change; that commitments made at previous gatherings will be honoured, and that far-seeing vision will prompt bold action.

In silence we remember people, among our families, friends and people we know who are going through difficult times.

Living God, Creator of all life, Origin of all love, Source of all Goodness, Everlasting and Eternal, raise our vision, stimulate our hope, kindle our compassion towards the realisation of all for which we have prayed.

Amen.

This hymn is about trusting in God in the present and for the future.

Hymn 736 Singing the Faith (678 Hymns and Psalms) " In heavenly love abiding"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SFxG0h57kk>

1 In heavenly love abiding,
no change my heart shall fear;
and safe is such confiding,
for nothing changes here:
the storm may roar without me,
my heart may low be laid;
but God is round about me,
and can I be dismayed?

2 Wherever he may guide me,
no want shall turn me back;
my Shepherd is beside me,
and nothing can I lack:
his wisdom ever waketh,
his sight is never dim,
he knows the way he taketh,
and I will walk with him.

3 Green pastures are before me,
which yet I have not seen;
bright skies will soon be o'er me,
where darkest clouds have been;
my hope I cannot measure,
my path to life is free;
my Saviour has my treasure,
and he will walk with me.

(Anna Laetitia Waring 1823-1910)

Benediction - Transforming, Life Giving, Eternal God, may the blessing of Father, Son and Spirit dwell deep within us, making us agents of your transformation. Amen.