

## Sermon Notes Sunday 27 October 2019

All Saints Murwillumbah

*All Saints Day*

Dr Murray Harvey, Bishop of Grafton



*Communion of Saints, Elise Ritter*

*There was once a wild goose who went to live with some tame geese. He was committed to liberate them from their mediocre lives. The wild goose lived with the tame geese for a year, and he enjoyed the rich food, comfortable shelter and easy life. Each year, when the wild geese flew overhead, he would flutter his wings, prepare to join them but settle down again in the farmyard. Ten years passed and the wild goose became tame, and it forgot how to fly.*  
Soren Kierkegaard

As we celebrate All Saints Day we are reminded by this liturgy, by its readings & prayers in word and song - of our true identity.

Our true identity is citizens of heaven. Those saints who we remember today, those who have gone before us, have thrown off their earthly cares and concerns and have taken wing and soar in freedom.

We, on the other hand, live largely among the tame geese. We enjoy rich food, comfortable shelter, a life of routine.

But what is a Saint? I imagine you have asked yourselves this question many times, being dedicated to All the Saints, but here are a few thoughts I'd like to offer.

Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, says that Saints "have a sanctifying influence on the whole church"; "they show us what is possible", "making themselves nothing, they make room for God".

He uses a different analogy to mine: he says a Saint is like a musician, the musician who fully becomes her true self, as she gives herself completely over to the creative intention of the composer, she is saturated, yielding herself, her soul, to the composer's will.

This is what a Saint does: fully giving themselves over to God's creative intention. It's dangerous to make too much of an analogy, or worse, to swap back and forth between analogies! But using Rowan Williams's insights: The wild goose, living comfortably amongst the tame geese hears the call, the invitation of the wild geese to join them. Hopefully they will rediscover their true identity, the original creative intention of their creator, find their wings and begin to fly.

On All Saints Day (and on All Souls Day which follows closely on its heels) a lot is said about eternal life and there is a tendency to think that eternal life is something enjoyed only in heaven, but the scriptures are clear that eternal life starts now.

If this is so, how can we live more like the wild geese, here and now?

In the scriptures, Jesus shows us a way that we can live eternal life now: putting the other first, putting the Kingdom first, being present for the other, by being motivated not by fear but by faith. In other words, by living as his disciples, we show that we are not tame geese after all, but that we respond to a higher call beyond ourselves – the call of our creator to another way.

Much of this way is echoed too in his teaching in the Beatitudes that are part of the Sermon on the Mount and are our Gospel reading for today.

The beatitudes reveal to us eight qualities that bring God's blessing:  
meekness and mercy,  
poorness in spirit and purity of heart,  
mourning and hunger,  
peacemaking and persecution.

Jesus highlighted these to offer both encouragement and instruction on living distinctively as his followers, according to a "different call".

*What is the meaning of the word 'Beatitude'? And how does it relate to the word 'Blessed' used in Luke? The word 'Beatitude' is not found in the English Bible. It is derived from the Latin word 'Beatus' meaning 'Happy' or 'Blessed', the meaning of which is very close to the original Greek word that Jesus used during His sermon on the mount. The Greek word for 'Blessed' is 'Makarion' which means 'happy, supremely blessed and fortunate'.*

We can identify eight Beatitudes in Luke's account. Each seems to have an associated value, or a call to a different way of life. Blessed are:

1. The poor – or poor in spirit – who do not trust in status or riches (The call to **Humility**)
2. Those who mourn – who grieve over the injustice in the world (The call to **Empathy**)
3. The meek – who get angry but who never get aggressive (**Self-restraint**)
4. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness – who seek justice (**Righteousness**)
5. The merciful – who are compassionate to all in need (**Mercy**)
6. The pure in heart – who are whole-hearted in desire to do right (**Integrity**)
7. The peacemakers – who work for peace in a world at war (**Non-violence**)
8. Those who are persecuted for righteousness – who suffer for just causes (**Perseverance**)

So these Beatitudes suggest a clear set of **ethical commitments** that Jesus would advocate we make if we are to engage the world around us.

If you want to live more like the Wild Geese and not among the comfortable and complacent Tame Geese, then:

1. **Identify** with the poor 'in spirit'.
2. **Grieve** over injustice in the world.
3. **Get angry**, but never get aggressive.
4. **Seek to do justice**, even to my enemies.
5. **Extend compassion** to all those in need.
6. **Act with integrity**, not for the publicity.
7. **Work for peace** in the midst of violence.
8. **Suffer yourself**, rather than inflict suffering.

*For further reading about adopting Plan Be – The Beatitudes, visit Dave Andrews' website <http://wecan.be/beatitudes>.*

Today we give thanks for the saints. The saints who have, each in their own way, lived grateful, thankful lives according to a different call.

*Let us pray*

Blessed are you, Sovereign God,  
ruler and judge of all,  
to you be praise and glory for ever.  
May the light of your presence which the saints enjoy  
surround our steps as we journey on.  
May we reflect your glory this day  
and so be made ready to see your face  
in the heavenly city where night shall be no more.  
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

