

TALK ALL SAINTS VENDEE 11th July 2021

Ephesians 1:3-14 *Mark 6:14-19*

We are living in strange times. Just 16 months ago we had settled routines, which for Christians locally included meeting together at regular Sunday morning services - and socially at other times - then came Covid-19 with all the attendant precautions and confinement periods. Of course, we can worship any day of the week and anywhere we find ourselves, but we do like to have established points at which we can meet with friends to praise the Lord.

While we've not been able to physically meet as Church, we have been carrying on God's work in our daily lives. And thanks to the wonders of technology, we have been able to keep in touch and to worship together via Zoom. . Now we are led to believe that, soon, most of the restrictions will be removed - and no doubt, like me, you've been wondering what we've learned from our experiences, where we go now, and what we do next !

The reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians sets the life of the Christian Church in the context of the cosmic plan of God. It was written while he was under house arrest in Rome for preaching the Good News, and was intended to show them how to nurture and maintain the unity of the embryonic Church in Ephesus.

It gives detailed advice as to how Christians should live together, day by day. but its important that this advice is seen in its proper setting. Christianity is not, at its heart, simply about living a decent and moral life. Its about living the life we were individually created for, in tune with the God who made us.

That's why Christians are right to agonise over the way our lives bear witness to the God we seek and serve. Fortunately, our often ineffective efforts are not the only force at work. Behind us is the power of God, which will not be overcome.

Paul's letter starts right at the beginning, reminding the readers of our dependence on God, and how much we already have to thank him for. We are reminded that we are not saved because we deserve to be, but because God is gracious, showers his kindness upon us and freely gives salvation. No religious, intellectual or moral effort can gain us salvation -it comes only from God's mercy and love.

And he saves us according to his plan. Its hard to understand how God could accept us but, because of Christ, we are holy and blameless in his sight. God's purpose is to offer salvation to the world and its been his plan from the beginning of time. He is sovereign, he is in charge. When our life seems chaotic, we can rest in this truth: that Jesus is Lord, and God's in control.

It is the nature of God the Son to go out and show the love of the Father, so that Son and Spirit can gather everything that is made back into the life of the Maker. This is

what we are made for - to be part of the ceaseless flow of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit and to extend that love to others..

Christians, then, live as people who know God's plan for the world. We know that God has made us to be part of his glorious life and love. We carry in our very blood the antidote to the belief that life is pointless, and that evil always wins.

We do need to make it our solemn and binding duty never to forget the Christian calling to joy and hope, to praising and glorifying our God. We do need to hold always before us the knowledge that the world and its fate are in God's hands, and he who has held it in love from its birth is not going to drop it now.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in us demonstrates the genuineness of our faith, proves that we are God's children, and secures eternal life for us. His power works in us to transform us now and what we experience now is a taste of the total change we will experience in eternity.

Knowing the huge and final plan of God does not always help us to see where we are going every day. Many days, weeks and months can pass without any sign that they are furthering the final goal of gathering the world into Christ. Faith is needed.

To praise and glorify God, and to live in the truthful knowledge of the over-riding purposes of God will not necessarily make our lives easy. As followers of Christ, with our knowledge of the crucified and risen Lord, as the image of the invisible God, and the fulfilment of all God's plans, we perhaps shouldn't be surprised by that.

At the start of this service we sang:

*"As I travel through the bad and good
Keep me travelling the way I should,
Where I see no way to go,
You'll be telling me the way I know."*

So, as in the weeks ahead, we reflect on what's happened in our lives in the past year, let's all, as God's children, remember his love for us and his ultimate plans, and, in that context, respond to his loving concern for us and try to find where God is leading us next in witness and worship.