

ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY

PREACHER : The Revd Diane Rees, Priest Vicar

Sunday, November 1st 2009

Isaiah 65:17 – end, Hebrews 11:32 – 12:2

3.15pm
Rochester Cathedral

'I think', said my 7 year old as he got out of the bath a couple of nights ago, 'I think...Jesus is a bit of a boaster'. 'A bit of a boaster', I respond, wondering whether my years of theological education will be able to help me here, 'what do you mean, a bit of a boaster?'

'Well, he says...you know all that stuff about 'I am' this and that, and 'don't forget me', 'do this in remembrance of me...'

It got me thinking. About how my 7 year old could think of Jesus as a bit of a boaster. And what about these men, who 'through their faith' are held up as examples for us to follow? And what of us on All Saints' Sunday? Can we really be saints, people of faith, hope and love who are called to *do* justice, *love* mercy and yet also to walk *humbly* with our God? We kind of understand hope, love, justice and mercy but the *faith* bit gives us problems and so does the *humility*.

Let's just have a quick look at this passage from Hebrews, which is written in the style of a sermon albeit a much longer sermon than we are used to! This is the 3rd section out of 4 and it is about faith...faith as an insight into an unseen but real world.

One of the things that is encouraging about this list of men is that although they are all people of faith, they are also real, flawed human beings. They are...people who are courageous and yet sometimes fail to take action, people who can be manipulative and yet capable of showing great vision. They sometimes lie and on other occasions are unafraid to speak the truth even when that is hard, they can show great integrity and yet sometimes let God down.

Oddly enough, these people of faith are held up as examples for what they have *not* done. Despite their great faith and testimony, they 'are not perfected without us'. They are not models but rather a 'cloud of witnesses' to encourage us to 'run the race set before us'. This is an invitation to Christian life as a 'journey of transformation' which leads us to 'the new heaven and new earth' described in the Isaiah reading.

This is an invitation to a journey of faith. Faith which is not about certainty - for if we are certain we do not need faith. Nor is it about pushing our doubt, our questions, our fears to one side but rather faith is about hope and love.

Hope in a God who has come to give us life in all its abundance...hope in a God who is raised from the dead and is alive...hope in a God whose cloak we just need to reach out and touch...hope in a God who heals, transforms and makes us whole...hope in a God who will never leave us or forsake us...hope in a God who asks us to let go and take risks, who asks us to let go of the edge but promises to hold us up on eagles wings and give us the courage to do so.

Faith is also about love...loving God with all our souls, our hearts and minds and loving each other as we love ourselves...not because we can but because we must...because we are the children of a God who has first loved us, who delights in us, whose love for us is higher, deeper, wider, more wonderful, bigger, passionate than we can ever think or imagine.

But how are we to run this race set before us, how are we to live this journey of faith and transformation, how are we to be saints and yet...how are we to walk humbly with our God into this 'new heaven and earth'?

Just as faith is not about certainty nor is humility about putting ourselves down. It is not a lack of confidence, or subservience, dressed up proudly as being humble. Rather it is having a true sense, of who we are in Christ. It is about being the person that God really wants us to be, and the liberation from the compulsion to claim the centre stage.

It is about beginning to understand that '*I am, because we are*'. Many of Jesus' parables are designed to shock his hearers (and us) out of the 'cloud of self preoccupation' we so often seem to find ourselves in.

So far from being 'a boaster', Jesus in fact helps us to turn the *me/ I* into the *we/us*, and thus enables us to understand what true humility means.

Humility gives us a proper ambition for what we can do and frees us from the fantasies of what we are not able to do.

As Timothy Radcliffe says, "Humility is the virtue that gives us back courage, with a realistic understanding of who we are and what we can be with the grace of God, and so set out again to scale the heights".

We are saints because we know God and are loved by God.

And it is all the saints together, not individually, that have gone before, are around us now, and are yet to be, all the saints together are like a chorus, that together sings the song of faith throughout time.

Each of us knows something of God and together we can sing of what we know. You have gifts that I don't have. You cry tears that I cannot cry. I laugh the laughter you cannot. You believe when I struggle with doubts.

So...

Saints are...

In tune with themselves

Adventurous

Put other people first

Sometimes look foolish

Don't know all the answers

Know that everybody is somebody

And Saints...

Know they are loved

Are fun to be with

Sometimes fail

Need other people

Come in all shapes and shades

Always find another way

Sing inside

Live in faith and humility

...and know that flowers grow even when they are asleep