

An Address by Belinda Speed-Andrews, 1 November 2020

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Irish government have decided on a new policy for driving. Next week all cars will start to drive on the left hand side of the road and if all goes well, the week after lorries, buses and other vehicles will then join cars on the left hand side of the road.

I don't remember many jokes, it's not how my brain works but this joke is one that I still remember from my very early teenage years -as you can imagine it took me a while to work out what was so funny! My apologies if there is anyone here today with an Irish background.

A bit of a weird joke for All Saints day, but I'll come back to the reason for my joke in a bit. But today we come together to celebrate All Saints day. Throughout the liturgical year we celebrate both major and minor saints on given days. Today though, there is no one particular saint mentioned. Today is a reminder to all the faithful of our collective identity in Christ. All those who have gone before us in faith, all of us now who declare Jesus Christ as our Lord and all those to come, are all saints. In fact today's focus is perhaps more on those who never made it onto the liturgical calendar. There may be someone in particular that you remember, or who is still alive who gives you courage and hope to continue believing and living in faith, in spite of all the challenges you may currently be facing? But what today does demonstrate for us, I hope, is that we are all connected to one another in Christ; those who have died, those present here today and across the world and those yet to come; we are all the body of Christ and therefore saints.

In the first letter of John we heard today how we are all children of God; through God's generous, lavish love for us we are considered as children of God. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes of God's spirit 'bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ'.

We are all children of our earthly parents. Most of us, but I acknowledge not all children, learn from their parents or from their adopted parents or foster parents or careers, how to behave and to live in this world. We may even know what it is to be or to have been deeply loved by our parents. We know what it is to be a child. But what does it mean to be a child of God?

I now return to my joke. All joking aside though. How many of you have driven in a country where you have to drive on the right-hand side of the road? Quite a few of you I should imagine. I haven't though because in Malaysia where I lived for a good number of years, they too drive on the left-hand side of the road. And so I was trying to think how discombobulated my brain would be initially if I had to drive on the other side of the road when trying to remember that the inside is on the right not the left and that turning left is harder now and most of all going round a roundabout in the wrong direction. So what has all of this got to do with our readings today?

Our gospel reading is the well known Beatitudes, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. We heard in the letter to John that we are children of God and it is this teaching from Jesus that begins to expound what that means to be a child of God. Jesus is teaching the good news of the Kingdom and this means we are blessed. You may well be thinking, how can we be blessed by being poor in spirit or if we mourn? The meaning of the word blessed in the context of the Sermon on the Mount means to be placed on the right road. It doesn't mean to confer favour. In some translations the word happy is used, perhaps not ideal when you think of those who mourn or who are persecuted.

In this particular teaching Jesus is telling us how we can be on the right road; he is telling us how we can live his Kingdom now. But this teaching is totally disorientating for his followers as they thought that they knew how to live because Moses had given them the 10 commandments + all the other 603 commandments contained in the Torah. And for us too, living in a world where 'me' is the most important thing, where power, money and sex rule the world - you only have to look at the Epstein affair to see how sordid and despicable this way of life is - this teaching from Jesus is disorientating. Jesus is teaching us a way of life that is totally counter-intuitive; he is teaching us about a new way of being human some of which may already over-lap with the way we already live & some which exposes how totally messed up the way we live is. Jesus is calling his followers, he is calling us to re-train and this requires an enormous amount of intentional effort both individually and communally.

Let's go back to the joke about driving on the wrong side of the road then. Imagine if we as a community left here this morning having made a pact to live god's kingdom now and this meant that we all had to drive on the right-hand side of the road. Well we all know what the result would be. Collisions, accidents, tension, fines and more than likely, jail time. But this is exactly what Jesus is challenging us to do. To go out

and be members of a new and different kind of Kingdom, a kingdom that has a totally upside down value system and then just go and live it. It's a bit like learning a new language. You spend hours memorising new words and phrases to internalise it; to acquire a new nature and then ideally you become proficient. It will not happen over night; it takes time and effort and an intentionality.

Where do we begin? Perhaps on this day, All Saints day, we can look back at those of faith who have gone before us? They may be well known saints, they may be people of history; Ghandi, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela or just someone you have known over the years who has demonstrated to you a way of living where generosity, peace-making, humbling oneself, serving one another, & seeking others well-being are the highest values that they live by - these are Kingdom values but whoever you are thinking of, they have shown you how to live these values in their day to day lives. These saints are those who have struggled to live out this alternative way of life. They belong to the past, present & future of God's kingdom, including all of us here today who struggle to practise the Christian counterculture today.

We are in communion with the saints and when we come closer to Christ by living his kingdom values, the more we are deeply connected to those who have gone before us. But we are reminded today that it is through Christ, as children of God that we become a part of the communion of saints and it is this communion that declares to us that we are not left alone to struggle to live the life Jesus calls us to. It is to him, with all the saints that we set our sights and focus our lives.