**Sermon: All Saints Patronal Festival/All Saints St Katherine’s 7 Nov 2021**

**Isaiah 25:6-9, Ps 24, Revelations 21: 1-6a, John11:32-44**

Jesus wept! It is one of the most poignant moments in the Gospel of John. Jesus loss of his friend brought him to tears. A very real and human response to grief and loss. Jesus was moved and disturbed in spirit when he saw Mary and the those who were weeping with her. Jesus loved Lazarus. But Jesus does not stop at this point, grieving for the loss of a dear friend. No, Jesus does something marvellous in the eyes of all those standing weeping for their dear friend. Jesus words to Martha’s condemnation brings faith into the circumstance. Jesus prays, and he prays openly before all those gathered saying, ‘Father, thank you for having heard me. I knew you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd, so that they may believe’ (Jn 11:41-42).

Today we celebrate our Patronal Festival of All Saints. So who are Saints? There are those who have been formally canonised as Saints and there is a long list of those, but we too are counted among the saints. I wonder what of the ‘saints’ of All Saints and St Katherine’s? What is to be said of all of us? How are we to be described? Perhaps it may not be right to pursue such a risky venture. For me, perhaps, silence might be the best recourse!

What is it about the lives of the Saints that draws us into the mystery of God. For me, it is their clear need to know God and to be known by God, and to make the message of the Gospel known. As I contemplate the many saints who have given their lives to God, those who recorded their intimate thoughts and experience of their relationship with God, I realise that we live in a continuity of those who have believed in God, believed the good news of the Gospel. I think also of the Gospel writers of Saint Matthew, Mark Luke and John, of St Paul, who has given us such a large body of writing in the New Testament, of St James, of St Peter, and all the other writers of the New Testament. These and all who have come after, the desert Fathers and Mothers, and all who have given us their deepest thoughts and experiences of their relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord. They have all provided us with one consistent message – our deep need for God. As the psalmist puts it, Like the deer pants for the water brook, so longs my soul after you, O God.

In an ever-fragmented world of increasing confrontation; where confusion and anxieties abound; and where there is much fear about the future – where it is all going? Where people seek for peace and relevance in their world. It is in the lives of the saints that we have a sure signpost for the church of the present and the future. And our life here on earth is to be lived in the context of life eternal., a more inclusive, catholic or universal vision, which draws out of the past into the present giving courage and confidence for us to more into the future. The litany of saints is not just a roll call of past heroes. No, they are our brothers and sisters in the faith of Jesus Christ. They have walked the path we walk today in our journey of faith. They are our companions, our guides who sustain us through their writing. These are the ones who have trod the path we know tread.

I wonder what vision of the church the Saints would be giving us today? I wonder, would they be wanting to inspire us once again. A vision of the church that is God’s and not our own. Knowing our need for God in our brokenness, in our human frailty – knowing our need and yet rejoicing in the great mercy and love of God who in Christ comes alongside us; who accepts us just as we are; and whose Holy Spirit is at work within each one of us and through us, to transform and change us. From our weaknesses to experiencing the riches of glorious inheritance. Coming closer to God, through Christ and by the work of the Holy Spirit.

The challenge for us, lay and ordained, is to seek to be grounded and informed by scripture, by reason and by tradition, that three-legged stool of Anglicanism. As we move toward the end of the church calendar, culminating in the celebration of Christ as King, what vision do you and I have for the church, for this place as the body of Christ who gather in Rosebud and McCrae. What difference does being a Christian make in our lives. To the decisions I make, my friendships, relationships, my whole way of being. How do our lives reflect the image of a God who calls us into wholeness, into a vision of facing God and one another and daring to go into the future with excitement, apprehension, precariously, trusting in God to be with us along the way.

Saints are signposts for the church, saints as scholars, saints as fools for Christ whose foolishness is the folly of the Cross, and the scandal of a crucified Christ. For the Saints, Fathers and Mothers who challenged the view of the church and it’s future, we are called to join them in their unfailing, unflinching belief that God in Christ was not just sent for us, but for those who sit outside our doors, to the poor, the hungry, the fortunate, the lonely, and those who are dying. I could go on, but you get what I mean. Christ has called us to call others. We are called like the Saints, to live out our lives in faithful service to God and to one another, to embrace a greater vision of what it means to be a member of the church of God here in Rosebud and McCrae.

Our Eucharist ends with the words, Go in Faith, to love and serve the Lord. We are to go out with confidence and joy in the name of the risen Christ our Lord, surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, and ourselves as witnesses and instruments of God’s love within our lives. May we keep alive a vision of the Church as those who have gone before us kept alive through their writings and the example of their lives. That vision of the Church as a Holy and divine society that embraces the sacred mystery of Church to be a home for all who enter and are welcomed to become Saints in the household of God.

Jesus prayer highlights for us today that God is interested in hearing our prayer. God always hears us when we pray. So let us pray to keep alive a vision of the church, to be a vibrant and living example of the love of God to all we meet and together with all the Saints, celebrate the good news of the Gospel in our lives.

Amen