

## **Sermon – All Saints**

**Isaiah 25.6-9, Revelation 21:1-6, John 11.32-44**

Who is the king of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty,  
the Lord mighty in battle.

Today we celebrate the All Saints festival with our brothers and sisters from the Lara RSL. It seems fitting to remember those who have gone before us, local people like Mary McKillop and the Reverend Walter Ernest Dexter, the Vicar of this parish from 1927-1940 and also the founding President of the Lara RSL. Reverend Dexter was a dynamic and colourful character. Born in 1873 in Cheshire England, he was originally a Master seaman. He fought in the Boer War and was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal and afterwards returned home to England to study theology at Durham University. In 1908, he was ordained in the Church of England and in 1910, after serving his curacy, he was sent to the new coal-mining town of Wonthaggi right here in Victoria. In this place he met his second wife Dora and they would go onto have 6 surviving children, 5 boys and at last, a precious daughter.

At the outbreak of WW1 Reverend Dexter enlisted in the AIF (Australian Imperial Forces) as a chaplain and served in Egypt, Gallipoli and France, and was again highly decorated, awarded the DSO (Distinguished Service Order 1916), and the Military Cross in 1918. He returned to Australia in 1920 and came to Lara in 1927 where he led the churches at Lara, Little River, Anakie and Balliang. He was actively engaged in these places among veterans and the local farming community. He was a man gifted with leadership qualities and great energy. He was a great writer, keeping

diaries for most of his life including his wartime diaries which have been transcribed in this book, as well as four books, 3 social histories and a novel. During his time in Lara, he also studied a Diploma of Education at Melbourne University so that he could teach at Geelong Grammar School where all of his 5 boys attended.

What makes an intelligent, vibrant, sociable person like Walter Dexter, the son of working class people, turn to God? Well, we know that his decision to return to England and study came after he lost his first wife in childbirth. They had been married just one year. It's not unusual that significant events in our lives lead us to think more deeply about the meaning of life, and death. How many of you have questioned these big, existential issues in moments of high stress, drama or bereavement?

Our Gospel reading today also presents such a situation. The family of Martha and Mary are mourning the death of their brother Lazurus. These people are close friends of Jesus. He breaks bread with them and shares his faith with them. They believe in him and in his power to heal. You can hear it when Mary kneels before Jesus and says, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' And Jesus began to weep. Jesus displays his full humanity here as he weeps with Mary. His love of Mary and of Lazurus is in full view. You can feel the emotions and the very personal nature of faith in Jesus. He asks, 'Where have you laid him?' and they respond, 'Lord, come and see.' He goes to the tomb in a cave with a stone rolled against the entrance and asks to 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the practical sister, says 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'

And here is the point. Jesus says to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' When we believe we see the glory of God. In this situation, it was the power of God to bring Lazarus back to earthly life and in this Gospel, this foreshadows the death and resurrection of Jesus himself which was only weeks away. In Jesus, death loses its sting. When we believe, we too share in that resurrection, that eternal life.

And this vision of God's glory is what the prophet Isaiah from the Old Testament is speaking about in our first reading when he says:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,  
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained  
clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain  
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,  
the sheet that is spread over all nations;  
he will swallow up death for ever.

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,  
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth.

Isn't it a beautiful vision of what eternal life might mean? A place for all peoples, a place of feasts, a place where sadness and guilt no longer exist. Well, perhaps we don't really know what it will be like. This is one of the great mysteries of life and death, and the prophet is using human metaphors, easily relatable, to describe a spiritual state. But it is still the promise from God, that we can all be part of this story, the story of salvation.

Today's readings include another vision of God's glory written 1000 years after the prophet Isaiah and after the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Revelation to John, from the last book of the New Testament, we hear:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

'See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;

he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.'

Have you ever wondered what is our world coming to, with conflict between nations, pandemics and ever increasing climate events? And at a more personal level, we have family break downs, rising mental health issues, substance abuse and domestic violence. All of us, I am sure have been touched by these. I know I have. I take comfort that in our resurrected life, the pain and the angst and the torment of greater global events will be taken away. That indeed, we will have a new heaven and a new earth.

How have you witnessed the glory of God? Perhaps you have experienced the miracle of healing? Perhaps you have seen God's glory in nature and in

the beauty of God's creation? Perhaps you have experienced God's glory in the love of a partner, a friend, a comrade, or a child. We all have so much to be thankful for, living as we do in this corner of the world. I think that Reverend Dexter was also able to experience God even in the trenches at Gallipoli. On Sunday May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1915, he wrote in his diary:

At 7am held Communion service in a little gully at Headquarters. 30 attended. There was no bread to be had in camp so I used a biscuit. Officers and men attended and one feels that the beautiful service drew them nearer to God than they have ever been before. Bullets were whistling over our heads all the time. Just below us on the road is danger corner where they usually get a couple of our men every day. At 10am I held a voluntary service for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade and most of the men attended who could. I selected the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade gully as it appeared the safest for they had not had much shelling there.

Today, we celebrate all the saints, people who have gone to God in faith, like Revd Dexter, and I like this idea that we shouldn't forget those that aren't famous, who were equally godly and who also lived their lives in faith. I always think of my own grandmother who was my first Christian mentor and guide. She would take me to Sabbath School every Saturday, and we would cross Sydney harbour on the ferry and then get on the train to Homebush to the Russian Seventh Day Adventist church. She read her bible every day and said her prayers every night. We always said grace at her table and she was simply the most generous and loving person I knew, who lived out the values of Jesus in her every day, humble life. How many other grannies or grandpas, mentors or friends, do you know that inspired your life journey or inspired the people around you?

And I think that this is what we are all called to do. We aren't all going to be famous or known for great deeds, or even write books or diaries! We can all, however, be as Christ asked us to be, loving our God with all our heart and with all our strength and with all our mind and with all our soul, and loving our neighbour as ourselves. Today when we remember the saints who have gone before us, we can certainly be inspired by them, and perhaps in our inspiration, we too will walk forward and inspire others by our own example of Christ-like living.