

My first thought on reading these verses was, 'Whatever happened to the Sabbath?' I remember Sundays as being days of rest. No football, no supermarkets, family days together visiting grandparents, church and Sunday school.

Before we answer the question, let's take a quick look at the idea of Sabbath rest in the Hebrew scriptures. There are two main Hebrew words used for rest in the Bible. The first is *shabbat*, which gets partially translated into the English word 'Sabbath'. This word for rest simply means to 'stop working'. Think of an hourly job where you clock out at the end of a shift. The work is done; there's no more until you clock back in.

The other main Hebrew word for rest used in the Hebrew scriptures is *nuakh*. This means to 'dwell' or 'settle'. This is not the same as clocking out from an hourly job. This type of rest is like sitting in front of a fire with a loved one or going on holidays. It's essentially about being restfully present.

In terms of creation, after six days of bringing order to chaos, now it was time for God to *shabbat* from this work. A few verses later, we read that God creates humans and then immediately 'rests them' or 'settles them' with himself in the Garden of Eden (*nuakh*). It seems like the ideas of *shabbat* and *nuakh* are meant to work together. God leads by example as he rests from work (*shabbat*) and then dwells together (*nuakh*) with his people.

Throughout the Old Testament, God's people turn to worshipping false gods, ignore his good designs for them, and rebel in just about every way possible. They shun the idea of *shabbat*, but God rests, *nuakh*, his presence with them anyway through the tabernacle and later the temple.

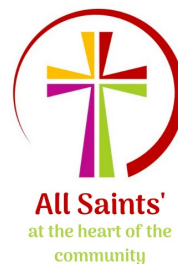
By Jesus' time, it seems that God's people had become weary and burdened by the heavy weight of observing the Sabbath. The people were in need of rest, both in ceasing from hard work (*shabbat*) and being present together with God (*nuakh*). Jesus hoped to redefine the meaning of Sabbath for them and provide them with the experience of being in the presence of God. Jesus ushered in the promise and reality of *shabbat* and *nuakh*.

Jesus reminded the people of God's actual intent for the Sabbath: unity with God and each other that was first found in Eden on page one of the Bible. Jesus taught that the Sabbath was about mercy and was purposeful. It was supposed to point to him, the one promised through all of Israel's prophets, the one who would restore the rhythm of creation. When followers of Jesus observe the Sabbath, they live as if this restoration has already taken place.

We need to take a break from the broken rhythms of hustle and hardship, to set aside a time of submission to his rule and enjoyment of his presence and to extend these things to the world around us. When we observe the Sabbath well, we become little resting places of God's presence.

So, today, what does this look like practically? Does it mean attending a weekend church service, or turning off work emails, or volunteering at a soup kitchen? Does it matter what day you observe Sabbath? Your Sabbath could certainly include those activities, and it could take place on the same day every week. As followers of Jesus, we aren't required to follow the laws given to Israel by God exactly. These were given at a specific time to a specific people-group for a specific purpose. Yet the wisdom of those laws is enduring. It is not a commandment we are bound to; it's a promise we're invited to.

Sabbath rest is an invitation we need to practise in our lives. It's where we can regularly engage in God's rule and allow him to reign in our hearts. We have to *shabbat* in order to *nuakh* – to stop working and truly rest in God's presence. When we do this, we make room for him to take up residence in our individual lives. When we do this together, we are making space for it in our communities. Even better, we are taking part in this new creation story, setting the stage for God to make his dwelling place, his resting place, right here, with us now.



SUNDAY 1st NOVEMBER 2020

ALL SAINTS' DAY

KINGDOM 1

The Season of the Kingdom is the time between All Saints' Day and Advent Sunday



COLLECT FOR ALL SAINTS' DAY

God of holiness,
your glory is proclaimed in every age:
as we rejoice in the faith of your saints,
inspire us to follow their example
with boldness and joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



READINGS FOR ALL SAINT'S DAY

1 John 3:1-3, and

Matthew 5: 1-12

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

5: Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

He said:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and
thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult
you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of
evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and
be glad, because great is your reward in
heaven, for in the same way they persecuted
the prophets who were before you.

REMINDER

All Saints **Annual Parish Church** meeting

is on Monday 16th November at 7.30 via zoom.

If you are not on the church electoral roll, please act quickly.

Phone Peter Snowdon on 0113 264 4593

The Vicarage
Church View, Thorner
Leeds LS14 3ED
Saturday 31 October 2020

Dear all

T S Elliott said: 'April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire'; but I'd say November is the most mournful month, mixing All Souls with Remembrance, dropping browned leaves onto wet grass.

On the next two Sundays we have ceremonies that both remember the lost and enable new life to sprout from the dead earth. Simply placing a candle on a cross or a wreath at a war memorial can form part of a healing process that allows rebirth and light to come from a very dark place.

As with everything else this year, we are having to be creative and do things differently with regard to All Souls and Remembrance Sunday, but that doesn't mean that this year the events can't be just as powerful, and perhaps even more meaningful.

On the first Sunday of November we hold an **All Souls' service** in Barwick, a time when people who have been bereaved in recent years are invited to come to a service and reflect on their loved ones. During the ceremony, candles are lit and the names of those who have died are read out. Normally we have hymns, poems, bible readings and a sermon. This year, to observe coronavirus restrictions, three things will be happening on 1 November.

There will be an Open Church session at Barwick church from 2–3.30pm for people to come and light a candle in memory of those they have lost; this is open to all who would like to come, but please notify one of the churchwardens in advance (on 0113 281 2149 or 0113 281 2488) if you wish to do this.

There will be the Service of Light at Barwick church at 4pm for those families who have had a recent bereavement; this will only be available to a few families owing to seating restrictions, so again please contact the churchwardens in advance if you wish to come.

If you feel you cannot attend either the Open Church session or the Service of Light, you can watch the service live-streamed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh6V_i_o3P4

Blessings, Andy

Reflections for the week beginning 26 October 2020

Monday 26 October: Reflection on Luke 13:10-17 (Alan Stanley)

We make decisions all the time. Some are big ones, some small. However you do your shopping, there are constant decisions to be made – when to go, where to go, whether to go or have a home delivery, what to buy, how much, what brand? Perhaps you are thinking about where to buy your Christmas cards – a charity, perhaps – Martin House, or one like the donkey sanctuary. The big decisions don't come up as frequently as the small ones, but how we make them will definitely reflect our personality and character.

Let me give you a Bible verse, then a scenario, then today's Gospel passage, and after that we will come back to the Bible verse and our scenario.

Philippians 2:5 – 'You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.'

Here is the scenario – an imaginary one:

Jane has a dilemma. She is in Tier 2 and is permitted to be part of two support bubbles, one for child-

seriously considering Herod's recent beheading of Jesus' friend and colleague John the Baptist (Luke 9:7–9). Jesus' response to the Pharisees, who are clearly worried about his safety, is to respond quite brusquely and dismissively, saying 'Go and tell that fox for me' (v.32); in other words, or as someone who I was giving unwanted advice to might say today, 'Go tell it to the wall, I'm not interested, I'm doing more important things.'

Jesus clearly has no intention of altering his travels or his plans because of a threat by the governing powers, a threat of violence, and a threat that has been channelled into action in the past. He emphasizes the importance of what he is doing by reinforcing to his listeners that the work he is doing will be done today, and then the next day, and the day after that. He then repeats himself, saying that 'today and tomorrow and the next day' he must be on his way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside Jerusalem. (v.33)

He goes on to say, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing!' (v.34). Christ is going to continue journeying forward despite the great danger he is walking towards.

One of the commentaries I read had an interesting comparison between Jesus' approach to spreading the word and that of the story of the prophet Jonah ... Jonah, who did not want to go, who had no love for the people he was sent to, who spoke God's words of grace, and received the Ninevites' repentance with indifference; Jonah, who wanted wrath and violence and vengeance; Jonah, who was controlled by fear and anger ... and one might consider a sense of 'exclusivity' in his rejection of God's call to extend grace to the Ninevites.

So what does that tell us about ourselves – as seekers of 'justice' or the right thing to be done, however you wish to define this – as an advocate, listener, adviser in, for example, a situation in our contemporary context when others are telling us to stop? I wonder who we are most like? Are we like an angry Jonah, judgemental, and heading towards danger controlled by fear and seeking vengeance? Or are we like Christ, spurred on by love and showing courage in the face of fear, anxiety or uncertainty. Who radiates a love that renders challenge powerless and refuses to listen to threats from the 'powerful'?

My hope and prayers are that I will have a heart full of compassion that will not waver in the midst of physical or verbal threats, and feel empowered to counter injustice. Our small acts of justice or advocacy will not always bear the fruit we want to see. Jesus' ministry and death did not immediately change the political and social systems he was fighting against. He tells Jerusalem in Luke 13:35: 'Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."'

As we journey with Christ, let us take time to examine our own hearts and reflect on the attitude and grace with which we are seeking to serve.

Let us pray.

May love inspire in us courage to overcome fear, wisdom to guide our way, and for our actions to come from an everlasting source, compassion. Amen.

Friday 30 October: Reflection on Luke 14:1-6 (John Crouch)

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?' But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.

Then he asked them, 'If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?' And they had nothing to say.

I can understand the statements that if people persecute Jesus, they will persecute the disciples because they are perceived to belong to one another. How often in life do people feel safe because they belong in a certain 'group': confidence in numbers. It starts in our school years; name-calling, bullying, jealousy because someone is seen to be more clever, studious, 'teacher's pet', etc. Even today in adult life people that are seen as loners, different or worse, different because of their birth, colour of skin, etc, they are persecuted. Jesus is telling his disciples not to be obsessed with being liked.

Jesus is preparing the disciples for some of the things that they will have to face because of their beliefs now and in the time of his death and afterwards. He is telling them to love one another, support one another. How often do we feel comfortable with people of 'like mind'. We can choose who to be friends with and whom we want to be loyal to.

Jesus never did anything wrong, yet people hate him. Hatred or love of God is what divides or unites people. 'Hate' is a very strong word, but in many cases, when the word 'hate' is used. people really mean 'fear'. Fear of the unknown.

I am sure that most of us have at some time been in discussion with people who are not practising Christians about our faith and beliefs. Some will be trying to understand, others will have been more vociferous about something that they can't or don't want to understand.

The disciples have been with Jesus and heard his teaching, seen examples of the things he did and will be given the power of the Spirit to speak about Jesus as the Son of God. The have each become a Christian and therefore belong to God's Kingdom, that is the different world that they now belong to. We celebrate today Simon and Jude the Apostles. Both men were known by other names. Simon was often called 'the Zealot'. A zealot is a person who is strongly committed to something – he firmly believed in the importance of people following Jewish law. Once he met Jesus, his life changed and he became convinced that the most important thing was to follow Jesus and his teaching. This Simon is not to be confused with the Simon that Jesus called Peter.

Jude is Jude Thaddeus, not to be confused with Judas the Apostle who betrayed Jesus and handed him over to be arrested. Jude is the patron saint of hopeless cases and desperate situations. People pray to Jude when they feel there is no one else to turn to.

Simon and Jude were ordinary men who were chosen by Jesus to teach others about God's love. They travelled together to teach others about Jesus. Centuries later this cascade of their Christian belief continues.

Almighty God, who built your church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone; so join us together in unity of spirit by their doctrine that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Thursday 29 October: Reflection on Luke 13:31-end (Deborah Murdoch-Eaton)

At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.'

He replied, 'Go tell that fox, "I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal." In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."'

Jesus is in the middle of his travels as a wandering preacher – and from what one reads, particularly in Luke, he was certainly challenging, exacting and at times comes across as being quite inflexible and even grumpy. You see this as he is warned by a group of Pharisees about the danger he is moving towards. King Herod was issuing threats against Jesus, which one might consider he should take

care for her grandchildren and one for the care of her elderly aunt and uncle. Fortunately, Jane has a sister who does not have children and who is happy to be the support for the aunt and uncle.

Jane has two children living nearby, and both families have children. They both need her support with child-care so that they can continue to work – thereby providing for their families, making a contribution to the wider society and paying their taxes. The choice facing Jane is whether to stick by the letter of the law and reject the call for help from one of her children, or to swap the aunt and uncle bubble for an extra child-care one.

Keeping in mind that dilemma, and the verse from Philippians 2:5 ('You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had'), listen to today's reading in which Jesus is confronted with a choice between keeping the written law or another law.

Now he [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, 'There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.' But the Lord answered him and said, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?' When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Keeping in mind Philippians 2:5, 'You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had', what would you decide to do if you were facing Jane's choice in our scenario? Would you stretch/break the Tier 2 rules to provide care for your family, or say 'I can't help; the law does not allow me to'?

I can no more tell you what your decision should be than I can tell you what you want to do with the next hour of your time. Only you have that unique mix of experience and Christ-like-ness which will let you decide.

We are looking at this Gospel passage with two millennia between then and now, and maybe we would be able to say 'Jesus made the right call – love trumps law every time'. But I wonder if it was that simple, or that complicated, for his contemporaries. The leader of the synagogue genuinely wanted to keep people connected to God, and in his scheme of things that was best served by keeping the written rules. Many Christians would agree with that today, but substitute the words of the New Testament for the laws of the Old. Others would say that God's love, grace and mercy alone are sufficient to guide our choices.

Rowan Williams very helpfully comments that, when making choices, we will not know at once if we have made the right choice; it may take years before we know.

How does Jesus healing of the crippled woman on the sabbath give you pause for thought when it comes to making your own decisions?

If you have been with me at other times and in other places you will know that I have been finding some prayers from St Benedict's Prayer Book very thought provoking and inspiring. Join me in this one, which may help as we reflect on this passage about making choices:

Grant O Lord, that none may love you less this day because of me; that never word or act of mine may turn one soul from thee; and, ever daring, yet one more grace I would implore, that many souls this day, because of me, may love thee more. Amen.

Tuesday 27 October: Reflection on Luke 13:18-21 (Debra Wheeler)

Then Jesus asked, 'What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.'

Again he asked, 'What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.'

You have to have some sympathy for the disciples. Things hadn't exactly turned out as they'd expected. They'd given up their jobs, left family and friends and home comforts for a life on the road with a young carpenter without connections and what seemed to be an irresistible urge to antagonise the religious leaders and those in authority. Yes, he certainly had charisma and miraculous healing powers, but they'd not seen anything that resembled a kingdom, and there was no sign of overwhelming the Romans. In fact, you could say that everybody was lining up against him and the future looked bleak. The disciples were certainly in need of a bit of encouragement and reassurance that things were still on track, and that the kingdom of God wasn't just a distant pipedream.

And that's just what Jesus does in these two parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. Quite simply, he reminds them that it's not all about size. Tiny mustard seeds grow into trees large enough to shelter birds, and it takes only a small amount of yeast to transform a measure of flour and make it dramatically increase in size and volume. What Jesus is really saying is that from small beginnings you can have great endings. And that the kingdom isn't going to be a big bang phenomenon – it will come in humbly and almost invisibly. A little goes a long way and can have an enormous effect.

Jesus seems to be urging the disciples to be patient and to have faith that the kingdom is coming. He's saying that little things do matter. The portion of yeast doesn't have to be very big but it does need to be part of the wider mix. Yeast only has an impact because of where it's placed; it doesn't work if it is outside of the bowl. Once again Jesus is emphasizing that the kingdom of God isn't the same as the kingdom of the World. It's not about size, celebrity, power and wealth. It's about slow and steady growth, about the disciples being embedded in the world – in the mix, so to speak, and remembering that little things matter.

And that's so encouraging for us to hear isn't it? Because sometimes what Jesus asks of us can feel quite overwhelming and unattainable. We know we shouldn't worry, but we do; we know we shouldn't be impressed by worldly things, but we are; we know we should forgive seventy times seven, but we hold on to petty grievances; we know we should share our faith more readily, but don't find it easy So to be reminded that little things matter and to look for evidence of small acts of kindness and witness being signs of the kingdom of God growing in our hearts is really encouraging.

My first boss when I was a trainee hospital manager was somebody called Ian Johnston. He was a good boss, an intelligent and thoughtful man, but not a Christian. We became good friends and stayed in touch over many years. I certainly wasn't the only one of Ian's friends to be taken aback when he started going to church and even more so when he put himself forward for ordination in his late fifties. We attended his ordination in Ripon cathedral and the small private lunch party afterwards. Ian made a speech at lunch, and I nearly fell off my chair, when he thanked me for lending him a book. He said that book had helped him discern his calling. It was a book called *God of Surprises* by Gerard Hughes, and I have to confess that I'd forgotten I'd even lent it to him. But it also solved the mystery of why I had been unable to find the book! On the face of it, such a small thing to lend somebody a book, but God was at work and it literally changed Ian's life.

Some of you will have heard me talk about Rainbow the Clown (and some of you have met Rainbow) and how I have used very basic circus and story-telling skills to speak about Jesus and share my faith. I was always very busy in the school holidays, helping out at church holiday clubs and the like. I remember one teenage boy who came to an Easter holiday club, and it's fair to say he was a bit of a handful all week. I'm sure he would rather have been somewhere else, but his mum came to church

and he was duly enrolled in the holiday club. I was really taken aback to see him in church a few weeks later and even more so when he came up to me and said that he had enjoyed my 'Gospel in a Suitcase' and it had made him want to find out more about being a Christian. God can even use a bit of silly slapstick to advance the Kingdom.

But my favourite story from my clowning days relates to a visit I made to the prison at Askham Richard to take part in their Sunday evening service. I have to admit to feeling a bit outside my comfort zone, but it seemed to go well enough. During my presentation I used a tape recording of a song by Michael Card, a Christian singer-songwriter, called 'God's Own Fool'. As soon as the service was over, a young woman came up to me and asked if she could have the tape. I said 'Of course', and felt so moved that my simple service had had such an impact on her. I stayed on at the end for refreshments and plucked up courage to go and talk to her. I asked her what it was about the song that she had enjoyed. Not sparing my feelings, she said 'Nothing' – she just wanted the tape so she could record over it! (And that alone gives you a clue to the fact that we are talking a long time ago!).

But joking aside, these are three very small examples of how God uses unremarkable people and actions to build his kingdom. It's rarely a big bang effect. You might want to reflect on the ways God has worked quietly and almost unnoticed in your own life. And how he has used some small and seemingly insignificant acts of kindness or service by you to have an impact on somebody else or a situation.

Little things change lives. We must never think that our part in kingdom business is insignificant or trivial. We have opportunities every day to further the kingdom of God through the small and the hidden – small, unseen moments of love, prayer, action, kindness. Jesus can use the small, the hidden, the obscure and the unintentional to change the world. This is the uplifting message for those who wonder where the kingdom is, or when the kingdom is coming, or doubt if it will ever happen. Jesus's message is that the kingdom is near, it's amongst us, and even if it's hidden, it's still growing.

Let us pray.

Lord, thank you for the ways in which you encourage us and build up our faith. As we go about our lockdown lives this coming week, help us to look for opportunities, however small, to be instruments of your love and your peace. Amen.

Wednesday 28 October (SS Simon and Jude): Reflection on John 15:17-end (Carole Cassidy)

This, then, is what I command you: love one another. If the world hates you, just remember that it has hated me first. If you belonged to the world, then the world would love you as its own. But I chose you from this world, and you do not belong to it; that is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'Slaves are not greater than their master.' If people persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours too. But they will do all this to you because you are mine; for they do not know the one who sent me. They would not have been guilty of sin if I had not come and spoken to them; as it is, they no longer have any excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. They would not have been guilty of sin if I had not done among them the things that no one else ever did; as it is, they have seen what I did, and they hate both me and my Father. This, however, was bound to happen so that what is written in their Law may come true: 'They hated me for no reason at all.' The Helper will come – the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me. And you, too, will speak about me, because you have been with me from the very beginning.

In researching this passage I learned some interesting observations and facts. Jesus refers to choosing his disciples from 'this world' but states that they do not belong to it and that is why the world hates them. What exactly is he meaning – that they belonged to another world than that which they find themselves in?