

All saints

John 11.32-44

Narrator

Jesus

The Jews

Martha

32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, '**Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.**' **33** When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. **34** He said, '**Where have you laid him?**' They said to him, '**Lord, come and see.**' **35** Jesus began to weep. **36** So the Jews said, '**See how he loved him!**' **37** But some of them said, '**Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?**' **38** Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. **39** Jesus said, '**Take away the stone.**' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, '**Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.**' **40** Jesus said to her, '**Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?**' **41** So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, '**Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.**' **43** When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, '**Lazarus, come out!**' **44** The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, '**Unbind him, and let him go.**'

George Gittoes encountered this preacher as Hutu forces marched closer to the Kibeho camp. Next to his original notebook sketch, he scrawled his recollections of this remarkable figure, he wrote:

'Two days ago there were thousands of people standing and pleading for help. Now everything is flattened – bodies crumpled amidst rubbish – their few discarded possessions.

This afternoon, as if walking through an invisible door, I came into a group who were calm. Though bursts of machine gun fire

surrounded them – continually getting closer with terrifying inevitability – they remained a solid congregation – bound together not by walls, but by prayer. A solitary preacher read to them from a ragged bible. He was a tall man in a yellowish coat sitting high on a sack of grain. He spoke in French with a thick dialect – his voice hoarse and broken – but I could recognise the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.””¹

In this painting, Gittoes depicts the preacher with hands raised, his skeletal frame draped in torn clothing. Clutching a tattered Bible in one hand, his expression appears almost tranquil. The figure stands before a violent mess of jagged purple and black brushstrokes, making the serenity of his expression all the more striking.

When exhibiting work like *The Preacher*, Gittoes ensures that an extensive text panel accompanies the painting. He believes that presenting written stories alongside his artworks facilitates an immersive viewing experience: ‘Someone might be impressed by the drawing or painting, but they really absorb it because there’s a story attached.’

Today we celebrate All Saints Day, a day when we think particularly of those who have died, and who, even in this life, kindled a light for us, or more precisely reflected for us and to us, the already-kindled light of Christ, like this preacher from Rwanda, those who have inspired us also to live truthful, honest, loving lives.

We have just heard the reading from John describing the raising of Lazarus, a very rich text from which to preach. Today, I want to focus for a moment on the very end of the story. Here, at the climax of the story and one of the pivotal points in John's larger Gospel, two critical things happen. First, Jesus commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb.

Second, he also commands the community to unbind him.

What is striking about this scene is that Jesus performs what is perhaps his most significant miracle -- so much so that not only are many in the crowd moved to faith but his opponents are moved to conspire toward his death --

¹ <https://www.portrait.gov.au/magazines/55/man-of-war-george-gittoes>

And he also instructs and expects the crowds to *participate in* and actually *complete* his miracle.

And both of these things matter. It is Jesus who has the power to heal, to feed, to restore, to bring to life, to redeem. At the same time, he seeks to involve us in these actions and, indeed, perhaps expects us to complete them².

Which makes me wonder what other miraculous things God intends to do in our communities, in us, with us, and through us.

Perhaps these things are huge -- directing our efforts to ending hunger in our community, and yes, this is possible.

Or providing shelter for homeless children and adults.

Or maybe these things are smaller -- providing a listening ear to someone who is struggling and feels alone.

Either way, I believe, God wants to continue to do miraculous things and continues to want to do them in, with, and through us.

All of this, in turn, brings me back to why this is a powerful message for All Saints Sunday. Saints, as I know you already know, aren't just those who have died. Rather, saints are those who have been declared holy. And, "declaring holy" is God's work, not ours.

That is, we are holy **not** because of some inherent quality or because of what we have done, but rather simply because God calls us holy. If you have any doubts, keep in mind that St. Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians -- those who were bickering, fighting, discriminating based on income, and engaging in all kinds of immoral behaviors -- by calling them holy! And if them, I'd say, then also all of us!

Which raises the question of what it means to be holy. Most basically, the Bible names holy, those things that have been set apart for God's work. And here's the thing: any work we do in faith can be called holy.

Volunteering with the Scouts or 123.

Or creating a home where laughter resounds.

Or being faithful in our duties at home or work.

² David Lose: <http://www.workingpreacher.org/.aspx?post=1627>

Or helping at Tadpoles or messy church or mainly music, or Rotary or Lions or at the hospital..

Staffing St John's Ambulance at events

Or visiting a neighbour who has a hard time getting out.

Or befriending a kid at school that other kids pick on.

Or... Well, you get the idea.

There is precious little in our life that can't be a place where God is at work to heal, comfort, and restore, if we look at it in this way.

And the thing is, very few people know this. In fact, very few people believe that what they do with most of their time is a *calling*. Most of what they do, that is, they believe is not worthy of the church's or God's attention.

We reserve words like "holy" and "sacred" and "saints" for church-stuff when it applies equally if not even more to the mundane elements of everyday life that have the capacity at any moment to be transformed into places where we perceive and participate in God's desire to care for the world God loves so much.

You are all saints. You comprise an important part of the "communion of saints". And as saints, you are called and commissioned to participate in God's ongoing and miraculous work to heal, comfort, and restore this world. This applies to those from Gippsland Grammar and St Paul's who are going to Rwanda, and it applies to those staying here.

God is still doing amazing things and God wants us to be part of those things, even calling us to complete them.³

³ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/.aspx?post=1627>