

**All Saints Day stands as a reminder that at the heart & soul of church is God's people investing deeply in each other.**

### **Who Has Invested in Your Life?**

When you think back on your life of faith, who has influenced you? Who has encouraged you on? Parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, siblings, youth group leaders, pastors, friends, writers of your favourite books...

When I speak to people about who has invested in them, I hear things like, "He took the time to pray with me". She took a genuine interest in me." "He helped me when I didn't know a way forward." "She taught me how to understand the Bible". "She was there for me. "He was someone I could rely on to be there".

I wonder if there's anyone here today who is a person of faith simply because one person decided to spend time with them, to be their friend, to share their faith, to encourage them in faith.

All Saints Day reminds us that such relationships lie at the heart of church. Our relationship with Jesus is not just a personal thing between God and me, it binds us all together in love.

John 13:35: By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

While we don't usually celebrate All Saints Day in our particular Christian tradition, it is an important celebration for many churches throughout the world and its focus to celebrate the communal bonds we share through faith in Christ and cheer on all the saints who have invested deeply in each others lives seems fitting as we close our Inspiring Australian Saints series.

All Saints Day stands as a reminder/challenge that at the heart & soul of church is God's people investing deeply in each other. This is essential for a healthy church.

### **How did All Saints Day get started?**

All Saints Day came about quite early on in the life of the church...

In the early church, if you wanted to point someone to the heart and soul of Christian faith you didn't point to the New testament (go read the bible mate) or to doctrines (well let me tell you about the doctrine of the trinity) or to the institutionalised church (take a left on High St, you'll see the steeple, go chat with the priest). Those things didn't even exist yet. Rather, you pointed to

your fellow saints. (come and spend time with us, I'll introduce you to my friend John.)

These communities of saints spoke with their own lives of God's presence and goodness residing with them - healing, wholeness, deliverance from evil, peace, acceptance, salvation, shalom in and through their lives.

Acts 2:43 - 45 - 'Reverential awe came over everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles. All who believed were together and held everything in common, and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need'.

They were Jesus' apprentices who took apprenticing others in the ways of Jesus seriously. And so in those early days, saints and martyrs would be fondly remembered after they had died on the anniversaries of their death. Feast days were held to celebrate and honour their lives and to give thanks for them and their legacy would continue on in the church community. As the Christian movement grew and the church grew and persecution grew, the number of saints and martyrs became so great that a separate day could not be assigned to each one. In the fourth century neighbouring provinces also began interchanging feasts. By that time a special day had been chosen to remember all saints. But it wasn't until the 7th Century that it was more formally named and decided on. Orthodox, catholic and many protestant churches celebrate All Saints Day. The focus is to give thanks to God for the lives of his saints, including both the famous and obscure. People throughout the Church are honoured, people who have in faith invested deeply in others, right up to those who have personally led us in faith in Jesus, such as your grandpa, aunty or friend.

### **All Saints Day is also a great challenge to us.**

In our time, we have many new wonders in communication and yet we have so many around us who are lonely. We are more connected than ever and yet more disconnected than ever at the same time. As we give thanks for those who have invested in our lives, we can't help but recognise all those who desperately need investing in and befriending.

And of course, the fact that we are a family of faith here at Northern doesn't mean we are one big happy family. The people we encounter as brothers and sisters in faith are not always easy to get along with. They don't stop being sinners the moment they start believing in Christ. They don't suddenly transform into brilliant conversationalists, exciting companions and glowing inspirations. And so we are stand-backish and apprehensive.

Today's scripture was an enormous encouragement to those early church folk to invest deeply in each other. I hope it will be to us today too. Lets have a look at it:

### **1 Peter 2:4-5, 9**

4 You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honour.

5 And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.

What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.

9 ...you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

For a first century jew, the great hope was that God would return to Jerusalem at long last, coming back to live forever in the temple - once, that is, it was properly rebuilt so as to be a suitable residence for him. The temple had been destroyed 400 years earlier and the jews had been sent to Babylon in exile. They had since returned and built a temple but there was no sign that God had returned with them. There was a prophecy speaking about the temple being built on the 'cornerstone'. Find the right 'stone' and you may be on the way to rebuilding the new temple, ready for God's return. In fact, during Jesus' life the Herod dynasty had been grandly rebuilding the temple from 18 BC through to 63 AD. Tragically it was finally completed only 7 years before it was totally destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.

With this context, Peter's words give two wonderful pictures that help us understand what is at the heart and soul of church!

2 images that go hand in hand:

### **Living Stones**

With Christ as the cornerstone, he is the foundation of God's temple. As followers of Christ, we are given the honour of being living stones in God's living temple, in whom he dwells.

As people belonging to Christ, God's presence within us marks us as a living stone in his temple.

Whether we like it or not, the moment we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, that is, from the time we become a Christian, we are at the same time a member of the church. The truth is, if God is my father, then this is my family.

So the question is not 'Am I going to be a part of a community of faith?' but 'How am I going to live in this community of faith?'

### **We are each other's priests.**

We are also all priests. Investing in each other means seeing the presence of God in the other - and when I recognise that you are my priest, our relationships are profoundly affected.

Tell story about Sharon being my priest this week...

### **Conclusion**

I want you to ask yourself:

Who are you investing in? Who are you encouraging to grow in faith at the moment? Are you paying attention to the opportunities God is giving you with others? What might be holding you back from helping another person in their Christian growth? What work does God need to do in your life to get you in a position to be an instrument of His grace in another person's life?

In this time in our church - uncertainty - who is going to be our next ministry team leader

I hope Northern has good teaching, good music, effective rosters, wonderful Careworks program, etc, but chiefly I desire that we be great at investing in people.

My prayer is for God to use this time to awaken us to pay greater attention to each other, to know who we are in Christ (living stones), to recognise each other as our priest (through whom God can administer his love).