

Intro - We are inspiring the saints

Welcome - Good morning

Through October, 'Inspiring Australian Saints' Series - Each week we will tell stories about a Christian life...we have picked out four people from our Australian history.

We are listening to stories about these four saints' lives who inspire us, we are enjoying the fascinating stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things through God's activity in their lives.

But there is another way to read the title of our series: this series is also about inspiring Australian saints! - that's you, everyone of you! - we are inspiring each other in our sainthood, we are recognising that we too are saints. We are paying attention to our own lives, to our own journeys of sainthood, to our own patch in God's tapestry and how God might be weaving us into it.

What I want to do today is convince you **that as followers of Jesus we are all saints.**

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What a Saint is

Saint - Greek: Haggioi - Holy ones. What does it mean to be holy?

'Holy' means "set-apartness, separateness, sacredness". There is a real weight of glory in the word 'holy'.

The english word "saint" comes from the Latin "sanctus", meaning a sacred or set apart person.

But only God is holy, right? The only true "saint" or holy one is God Himself. Yes!

67 times in NT. Every time, it is not referring to a special group of super spiritual types, or top achievers - it is referring to all followers of Jesus.

Paul's letters:

Ephesians 1:1 - Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:1 - Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi

Colossians 1:2 - To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae:  
Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

How can this be? God doesn't use his holiness to separate himself from us. He uses his holiness to step down and lift us up.

God says to Israel "I am the Lord your God; you shall name yourselves holy and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy" (Levit. 20: 7). 1 Peter 1:15. But now you must be

holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy.

We become holy and "sainted" because he lifts us into his holiness.

### **Being a saint is not about how good you are.**

'Saint' has to do with the way God thinks about you and the way God treats you. He deals with you as a holy person. That is, he is careful with you, he gives you dignity.

His relating to you does not depersonalise you or treat you as a thing. Rather he brings out who you were created to be.

When New Testament writers realised that, they had no trouble designating each other as 'saints'. It was not embarrassing. It was simply a reminder of who we are (becoming) in Christ.

We are partners in Christ, our role is vital and that is to trust him, to live prayerfully and carefully with him and His role is to shape us, connect us in and weave us into his purposes

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When the church in early centuries began to use the word 'saint' as a title of honour or accomplishment, the first impulse towards doing that was good.

We were looking for people to look up to, admire and follow in whom it was evident that God was working. Someone who we could see Jesus in, who could show us how its done.

That was certainly a better idea than what we do today, holding up self-promoting celebrities to emulate.

Unfortunately, over time this created a bi-level understanding where there were the super-holy 'saints' and then there were the rest of us.

This meant that ordinary Christians no longer saw themselves as holy, as saints.

And nor, I suppose, do the saints appreciate this false divide. I remember Dorothy Day, the tireless advocate for the poor and against injustice in New York in the mid 20th century saying, 'Don't call me a saint, I don't want to be dismissed so easily.'

And so back in the 16th C, when the reformers came along they threw the whole thing out, which was probably good at the time...

But I think we need the word 'saint' again now. Because we need re-imagining, re-orienting.

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### Crisis of Identity

Our day is marked by insecurity of identity as too often the precious bonds of faith, heritage and tradition are stripped away in pursuit of individual freedom.

As someone who works often with young people who are long term unemployed, I have walked alongside people who have felt unraveled because the story they thought they were following lost its thread. The dominant stories of success that society paint for us

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can be very powerful. They tell us when we are winners or losers. If that's all we have, that is too thin a story. I don't know if you sense an urgency for us to do this. But I do.

We need to recover this sense that our identity is not defined by who our society tells us we are or by what we look like in the mirror, but by who God says we are.

Eric Liddell, who was the Olympic gold medalist runner in the 1924 Munich Games, said, "Circumstances may appear to wreck our lives and God's plans. But God is not helpless among the ruins. Our broken lives are not lost or useless. God's love is still working. He comes in and takes the calamity and uses it victoriously, working out his wonderful plan of love."

Conclusion:

Enduring Psalm - written in early years - sums up David's life - appears just before David's last words...this section epitomises the identity of a saint.

## **2 Samuel 22:21-25**

God made my life complete  
when I placed all the pieces before him.  
When I cleaned up my act,  
he gave me a fresh start.  
Indeed, I've kept alert to God's ways;  
I haven't taken God for granted.  
Every day I review the ways he works,  
I try not to miss a trick.  
I feel put back together,  
and I'm watching my step.  
God rewrote the text of my life  
when I opened the book of my heart to his eyes.

Notice the interplay: Our part to daily choose to participate in sainthood is indispensable, allowing God to play his part, shaping us, putting us back together, weaving us into his purposes.

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In conclusion. We are indeed saints. We are being made holy as partners in Christ. This is our central story: This is who we are.

Don't stall. We need to learn how this works...lets listen to God, lets learn from scripture, lets pay attention to other saints who have gone before us, lets encourage each other.

Jesus came to announce to us that an identity based on success, popularity and power is a false identity - an illusion! Loudly and clearly he says: 'You are not what the world makes you; but you are children of God.' — Henri Nouwen