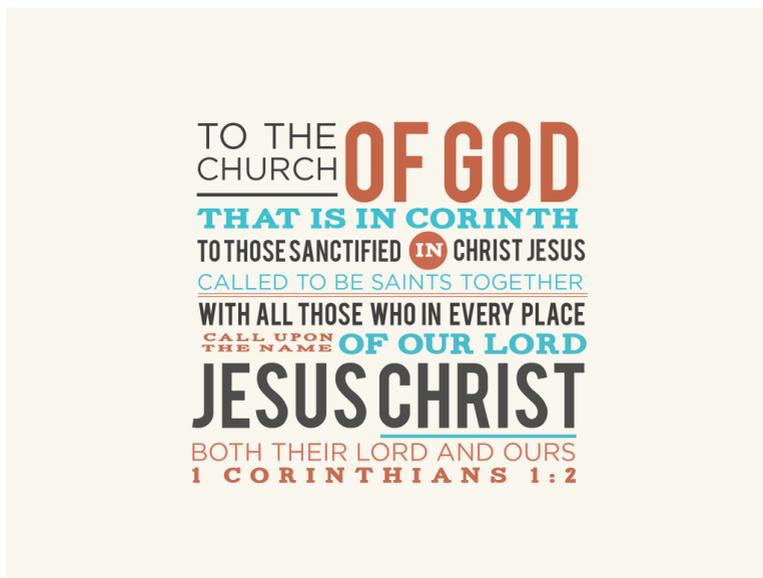


All Saints Sunday. November 3rd. And International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

Luke 6:20-31.

All Saints Sunday. The Church across the world remembers Christians who have died in the faith of Christ - there will be people we know and loved who fallen asleep in Christ this past year, or loved ones, who may have been commended into the keeping of Christ perhaps a number of years ago but their death is still very close and real to us. Those we remember...thankful for the rest in Christ they enjoy, that they are secure in Christ for nothing can snatch them out of his hand, and thankful for the hope of the resurrection to come.



When we think of saints, we mean all Christians - as Paul reminds us in 1 Cor 1"

2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."

Made saints - by the blood and work of Jesus, and called to live as saints. This is not the only time Paul mentions this. He uses similar words to Christians in Philippi, Ephesians, and to those in Rome. And so a saint isn't only someone who has died, we, you, are saints - we are ALL SAINTS through the grace and blood of Jesus. That is who we are and who we are called to be. So All Saints Sunday - I'd suggest, we not only remember the saints of the past, but also the saints among us, and remember the call of God, to be who we are - we are saints, and called to live as saints.

As I said, in the children's talk, this month has the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Many churches and Christians use today's date , focusing upon the persecuted saints, some of whom will face the threat of martyrdom this day. Other churches use the 10th or 17th of November. Today we join the worldwide body of saints, remembering those saints.

**ONE FAITH – ONE FAMILY**

**LET US JOIN TOGETHER IN PRAYER**

**INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER  
FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH**

**NOVEMBER 3, 2019**

Jesus said persecution would happen. When describing those who enter the kingdom, as he looked out at the crowds and reminded them that the kingdom life he is teaching, proclaiming, demonstrating, can and will mean persecution. He defines persecution with four verbs. He looks at James, John, Simon the Zealot, Matthew and says - men will hate you, they will exclude you, insult you, reject your name - your name Simon, your name

James, your name Andrew, as evil. All because of their trust and faith in Jesus as the Son of Man. When they experience this, he says, they walk in the footsteps of many OT prophets. Later Jesus will remind them, at the last supper, "if they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." (John 15:20). Paul in his last months, in prison, writes to Timothy: "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." If we seek to live as saints, persecution will come Paul warns.

When we think of the persecuted parts of the church, there are a number of ways we can be alongside them. We have mentioned **prayer** and there are Open Doors resources on the back table to guide you how to pray in an informed way. You **can pray** but also you can **take action** - to speak out for them, to write to relevant embassies, to write to politicians sharing how important this topic is, asking your home govt, or the Dutch govt to keep this as a priority or to raise a particular issue / situation with them such as the church closures in Algeria or China. You can **take action. You can write - send encouragement** - different organisations enable you to write to Christians in prison or to believers who face or recover from persecution. **You can give financially** to seek to support those organisations whose calling is to be alongside the persecuted saints. Twice a year, our charitable giving goes towards Open Doors. You can take action, you can pray, you can send encouragement, you can give financially.

**Finally you can receive.** Persecuted believers have so much to teach us about what it means to be a Christian and to live as a Christian, 100% for Christ. One of the Dutch pastors who works to support and teach pastors in the persecuted church family, shares how much they have given to him as a pastor and how much he learns from them as he travels and teaches persecuted

church pastors. So this is not, those poor persecuted believers, and how can we help. It is more, 'what can we learn from them?' Around All Saints Sunday, there are certain prayers the Church of England use - 'Almighty God, grant us grace so to follow your saints in all virtuous and godly living'; as we have prayed earlier, 'as we rejoice in the faith of your saints, inspire us to follow their example.' and 'you have kindled the flame of love in the hearts of the saints, grant to us the same faith and power of love.'

What is the example of persecuted saints, their flame of love, their godly living?

Jesus having warned his disciples, of persecution. Then teaches them.

"love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other one; if someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic... do to others as you would have them do to you..." Jesus was and is the most brilliant teacher, informed, relevant communicator. He knew what he was asking and knew it was possible, in the power of the Spirit, from a heart shaped and renewed by God. But it is hard. A Nigerian Bishop reflecting upon the frequent attacks by Muslims upon churches and congregations. He was weary from the many attacks and he said: We have turned the other cheek so many times we have no more cheeks to turn." Many Nigerian young Christians have quoted the Bishop showing how hard things are. It is perhaps one of Jesus hardest commands - to love our enemies.

But a true Christian always seeks a persons' highest good - even when they are mistreated. Brother Andrew said : "The

Christian's only method of destroying his enemies, is to 'love' them into being his friends." A great lesson from the persecuted Church is praying for those who persecute you - a way to love your enemies.

Some true stories showing us how to live out Jesus teaching. These are stories from resources provided by Open Doors.

Noskie was a former Iman in the southern part of the Philippines. He was a devout Muslim, respected by the little community in which he lived. Coming home from a fishing expedition one day, he was shocked to discover that his two daughters had converted to Christianity. He was very aware of the shame that this would bring to the whole community.

In his anger, he beat them without mercy hoping they would renounce their new faith. But his daughters remained faithful. They loved their father. And knew nothing was impossible with God so they started praying for their father's conversion/

Sometime later while fishing, Noskie felt a sudden piercing pain in his stomach. As the pain increased, his belly began to grow in size like a balloon. He writhed around in unbearable pain. He prayed but nothing happened. In desperation he cried out to the God of his daughters, Jesus Christ, and was instantly healed. Noskie emerged from the experience a new person. He submitted his heart and surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Today he faithfully serves the Lord as a lay pastor and his daughter help in the ministry.

The Kingdom life. Jesus says. Love for your enemies. Praying for them. Blessing them as they curse you.

A Chinese House Group pastor was imprisoned for 3 weeks. He shared: "Whenever I was beaten up I would first feel searing pain., and then another feeling would flood in, almost wiping the pain away. It was pity. Pity for the man who was beating me. I kept seeing my interrogator as a man gone wrong. I felt sorry for his mother, who would be so ashamed of him. I wondered what kind of father that he must have had, to turn him into such a monster. I felt sad to be in the presence of one of God's creatures that could treat another human so badly with so little concern. Then I would get amazed at myself. Through the pain I would think : 'I should be angry, but I'm not. All I want is for this man to be saved.

"I had three ribs and a wrist broken, two teeth knocked out, my kidneys were malfunctioning, yet all I could wish for was this man, beating me to find Christ and forgiveness.

"It sounds very strange. It doesn't even ring true. Its more human to be angry, or to be afraid. But I can only say this was not myself making me feel that way, but Christ within me. It was superhuman. It was Divine."

Romanian pastor Paul Negrut was visiting an old friend in Romania called Trian Dors. As Paul went in, he realised that Trian was bleeding from open wounds. He asked 'What happened?' Trian replied: The secret police just left my home. They came and confiscated my manuscripts and then they beat me." Pastor Paul shares 'I began to complain about the heavy tactics of the secret police'. But Trian stopped me. Brother Paul, God didn't bring us together tonight to complain but to praise him. Let's kneel down and pray. He knelt and began praying for the secret police. He askde God to bless them and save them. He told God how much he loved them. He said: God, if they will come back in

the next few days, I pray that you will prepare me to minister to them. Pastor Paul shared: By this time I was ashamed, I thought I had been living the most difficult life in Romania for the Lord. And I was bitter about that.

Trian Dors then shared with Paul how the secret police had been coming to his home regularly for several years. They beat him twice every week. They confiscated all his papers. After each beating, Trian would speak about faith to the officer in charge. "Mister, I love you. I want you to know that if our next meeting is before the judgement throne of God, you will not go to hell because I hate you, but because you rejected love." Trian repeated these after every beating. Years later, that officer, came alone to Trian Dors home. Trian prepared himself for another beating. The officer said: I came tonight to apologise for what I did to you and to tell you that your love moved my heart. I have asked Christ to save me. But two days ago, doctors discovered I have a very severe case of cancer and I have only a few weeks to live before I go to be with God. I came tonight to tell you that we will be together on the other side." (August 15th). A saint loved an enemy and that enemy became part of the communion / the fellowship of saints.

Finally.

Believers in North Korea's underground church recite 5 principles along with the Lord's Prayer at their secret gatherings. Can you imagine, as you will pray the Lord's prayer later, in HC, that you are joining with North Korean saints who are praying it... The five principles: 1. Our persecution and suffering are our joy and honour; 2. we want to accept ridicule, scorn and disadvantages with joy in Jesus name; 3. As Christians we want to wipe away others tears and comfort the suffering; 4. we want

to be ready to risk our life, for our neighbour so they can also become Christians; 5 we want to live our lives according to the standards set in God's word. (pg 91, Feb 15th).

They and many other saints today model to us what Jesus said:

<sup>22</sup> Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> 'Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.

Let's pray.

Thank you Lord you expect me to take your word literally. Help me be joyful in the face of any persecution for you. When I have enemies, give me your supernatural divine kind of love for my enemies so they too will love you. Lord, we ask you to encourage the saints in our world who at this moment are experiencing persecution for Your name. In Jesus Name.