

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44

I'm going to ask you to think about three things today that are all connected. The first is, what is a Saint? The second is, where is the adversary? The third is, how do we respond?

So, first, what is a saint? If I asked you to name ten saints, who comes to mind? Some of the most famous are Saint Peter and Saint Paul, Saint Francis, Saint Theresa, Saint Nicholas... and you may think of others. But what IS a saint? The word "saint" comes from the Greek word *hagios*, which means "holy" or "set apart." This is probably what most people think of first - the people who are different, the ones who probably stand out as a bit odd, a bit aspirationally and enviably holy, the ones who seem closer to God than the average mortal. A saint is unusual, and recognised as such by the official title.

But that isn't the whole picture. The word 'saint' has broader meanings. In the New Testament, the term "saint" often refers to all believers in Jesus Christ. Paul addresses some of his letters to 'all the saints' in the city, meaning, all those who are Christians. In this

context, a saint is still someone who is different and set apart, but the differentiation is between those with faith and those without, as opposed to those with extraordinary faith compared to average Christians. In this context, if you believe in God and Jesus, you are a saint.

This is where baptism becomes so exciting. We are baptising two new people into God's family this morning, Ava Grace and James, and in doing so we are starting them off on their own journey towards sainthood. As a church we model for them what it is to be a family of saints, and we commit to encouraging and teaching them as they grow up, just as we encourage and care for each other week by week.

Second, where is the adversary? To be differentiated as a person of faith, to be a saint in relation to a non-saint, there needs to be something that makes us stand out. Making sure that you are built around spiritual priorities will do this, but there are many things that could be adversarial on such a journey.

So what is the goal of your life and what do you do to achieve it? It's so easy to slip into anger, fear or judgement. So easy to prioritise the resume, to worry

that doing seven extracurricular activities each week might not be enough to have the edge. So very easy to let church, prayer, or thoughtful engagement in giving back, be squeezed out in the quest for keeping up. The adversary here could be anything that is allowed to take precedence over prioritising faith, and by faith I mean loving God and neighbour.

But the gospel reading today takes it even further. The adversary here is an inevitability that we like to ignore: the greatest adversary of all time - death itself. It has the final word in every argument and waits for each one of us. But here this greatest of adversaries meets its match. Jesus stands outside Lazarus' tomb and calls to his friend - the man who has been dead for three days and whose body is smelly and gross, and says, 'Come out!'. And Lazarus does.

Still wrapped in the burial cloths, he emerges newly alive into the stunned arms of his sisters and friends. Even this greatest adversary is overcome by the power of God, pointing ahead to the truth that even though death will continue to come for each of us, it will no longer be something to fear, because it only leads to reunion with our creator.

Third: how do we respond? Baptism is the perfect illustration of how to live faithful, saint-ful lives in the face of all that challenges us. It tells the story of death and resurrection, of the old giving way to the new, of identity being formed and chosen. We respond by showing up. We respond by passing on the faith that sets us apart and marks us as saints, as people who believe in God. We respond by joining together in raising the next generation of people who can hear the call of Jesus to walk away from darkness and into the light.

There are always opportunities to practice sainthood, and the darker and smellier the world around us seems, the more chance we have of being different, of bringing light and hope into a world that really needs it. We all have our own adversaries to overcome, but whatever it might be that holds you back, or gets in the way of loving God and loving your neighbour as yourself, Jesus calls us too to 'come out', to step away from it, to shed the burial cloths and be part of the family of saints instead.

Because Jesus calls us away from all the dark things that stench - whatever that is for you in this time we live in, all that is dark and grasping and takes you away

from being holy - and asks us to walk out into the light instead. Come into the light, and let the community of saints enfold you, trying anew every day to live a life of fellowship and service that marks you as a saint.

It's not easy, but that's what the baptismal covenant is about, this call to be saints. A call to be empowered in the face of any adversary because our God is one who makes all things new, including ourselves on a daily basis.

So welcome James, welcome Ava Grace, to this motley collection of incredible saints who surround you as Jesus calls you to join them.

Amen.