



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

## ***"Bible Talk: All Saints" - All Saints - 11/01/2020***

Over the past couple of months, Kate Bell and I have been watching a particular approach to ministry that has been done in a cathedral in Australia in Melbourne. And it's called the BibleTalk and it's meant to be a kind of scale of a show that you might see on PBS that would be steered for children. But in fact, it conveys a message which is appropriate for all ages. And so, because we wanted to be bold and courageous, we did our own. And we want to share that with you today for All Saints'.

[Video Plays]

"Kate: Hi everyone. I'm Kate Bell. I'm the Director of Children's Ministries here at Christ Church Cranbrook. And this is one of our family's chickens. This is Roxanne. And we're here today because I'm supposed to meet Father Bill to do a project with all of you. And he must be running a little bit late.

Father Bill: Hi Kate. I'm so sorry. Here I am. I'm so sorry.

Kate: Oh, I'm glad you're here. Did you get my text?

Father Bill: Yeah, I got your text. What did -

Kate: You were going to come and meet my chicken, but what did you bring?

Father Bill: Oh, I'm so sorry, Kate. I saw your text. I must've read it a little bit quickly. I thought you said to bring Church's Chicken to the church.

Kate: No, no, no.

Father Bill: I'm so sorry, Roxanne. That was unintentional.

Kate: Yeah. Well, we're all moving really fast these days.

Father Bill: I know. Golly. I'm so sorry to say, Roxanne, I also ate the wings on my way here. They were delicious.

Kate: Good try. Roxanne, it's all right. It's okay.

Father Bill: Sorry, how did that happen? It's a disaster.

Kate: I'm not really sure. But you know, you invited me here too, because you wanted to talk to me about the saints, and I really don't understand how the chicken is going to play into this talk of the saints.

Father Bill: Right. Well, I also got some eggs when I was out. These are fresh laid eggs. They're actually quite beautiful and wonderful, laid this morning. And maybe we have three kinds of chicken, chicken, three ways, as you might see in some restaurants. And maybe there's a way in which chickens in every form that we have before you today teaches us a little lesson about saints.

I mean, we have chickens like Roxanne who's incredible and wonderful and wearing a tutu. She's a chicken that's alive in every sense of the word. And then we have chickens at rest, like we have here with this Church's Chicken. And then we also have a chicken that is kind of a potential chicken at church, a chicken that's an egg and that's in process.

And maybe all three of these chickens have something to teach us about saints because saints are very much alive. Also, there are saints who are at rest and who have gone on to be with God fully. And then there's a way in which no matter whether the saint is alive for us to see or at rest, that saint is always in the presence of God.

And so that saint is always in process of becoming and moving closer and closer to God by the grace of God. And so the saints that we know either now, or that we have known, they're already moving towards God. And so maybe there's a way in which all three ways, we have a kind of window into what a Saint is.

Kate: Interesting. I see the connection.

Father Bill: Well, I want to say a couple of things about saints today. There's Saints with a capital "S" and then we have saints with a small "s," and this is a kind of reminder to us that whether or not a saint is well-known or even a saint that's not so well known, they're still saints in full. So we have a couple of examples to you today of Saints with a capital "S."

Kate: So one that comes to my mind when I think of capital "S" Saints is St. Francis of Assisi. And I remember hearing stories about him and his love of animals and nature, which really just connects with me. I have some animal and some nature right here, but I find God outside in nature so much.

And did you know that he was - you probably do. Did you know that he was the first one to ever do a live nativity?

Father Bill: No, I didn't know that.

Kate: Yeah! Isn't that fascinating?

Father Bill: That's amazing.

Kate: We do a live nativity here. It's just a - I loved knowing where that tradition came from and it came from one of the saints.

Father Bill: Well, one of my favorite Saints with a capital "S" who are well-known is Constance and her Companions. And these were a group of religious men and women in the Episcopal church who cared for people who were suffering from a bout of yellow fever that came to Memphis, Tennessee in 1878. And that epidemic of yellow fever hit the city and thousands of people left, but Constance and her companions stayed behind and cared for those who were sick even to the point of giving up their own lives so that others might live. And so that's an example to me of a Saint.

Kate: Oh, that's amazing.

Father Bill: And then locally, we have a similar kind of Saint. We have Solanus Casey, who was a monk in Detroit. And in the Depression, he opened up a soup kitchen that still operates to this day in which everybody came and were fed. And Solanus was also in charge of welcoming people to his monastery. And he did it constantly and would listen to people as they poured out their troubles, and he would try to find a way to give them some support. And he's a great example of a Saint with a capital "S."

But of course we have saints who are saints with a small "s" that are not venerated in the same way, but they've had a huge impact. And we have two that Kate was thinking of.

Kate: You've heard of Mr. Rogers, right? Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. He was a Presbyterian minister who spoke to children and families from the really young, and of course the parents that listened, too, about equality and love and challenges that come into our lives, and taught us how to be a kind neighbor and to look out for one another. And did you know he did all of his teaching virtually before we were doing all this virtual stuff? He taught for 33 years online. And it's an inspiration to me to keep going in virtual, to know that we can still have an impact.

Father Bill: In fact, one of the things that Fred Rogers said when they asked him about doing television is he said that television was an incredible opportunity to teach children and adults about grace. And I think about him often when we are doing all that we're doing these days online and even through other kinds of broadcasting.

Kate: He's pretty powerful. I'm grateful.

Father Bill: You have a saint with a small "s," not that she's not well known, but she's just an incredible saint in your life.

Kate: Right. My grandmotoco (sp?) was a saint among us, and I didn't even know the magnitude of her work until after she passed away. She unfortunately passed away because of COVID. She was 92 years old and she taught me how to be giddy with goodness and how to just love in ways that I didn't even know existed. She had adopted me as her granddaughter unofficially when I was 18 and just took me under her wing, so to speak, and loved my family and my kids and was part of their baptisms.

And I learned, after she passed away, some amazing work she did with the Monument Men, with the work of collecting the art during World War II, and just other positive impacts she had in the community to bring people together in a peaceful way. But my favorite memory of her is giving us mint chocolate chip ice cream at our house up in Pontiac. And she was at our baptisms and weddings in our family. We'll miss her dearly. Absolutely.

Father Bill: So to step back, one more time, into our analogy of the chicken, I think that the church is a nest for saints. We get to know these people and they've had a huge impact on us. It doesn't matter if they're saints with a capital "S" or saints with a small "s," they still have a ministry to us.

And we have to keep in mind that we are in the process of making saints here, even in this time. There are a couple of things I want to say as well, that are important to keep in mind when it comes to All Saints' Day. The one is that sometimes we see a big contrast between saints and sinners, but I want to suggest to you that every saint is also a sinner at the same time. Every saint is always in the process of becoming something greater because of the love of God going through them. And all that a saint has is an act of God's grace. So there's a sense in which saints are always this egg and always moving closer and closer to God while on earth and in heaven.

One of my favorite visions of heaven is by an early Christian writer named Gregory of Nyssa. And he believed that our movement to God, we grow closer and closer to God for eternity, and saints are people that give us a witness to that love while on earth. And they are fully doing it in heaven as we also, hopefully by grace are doing as well.

Kate: That's beautiful. Absolutely.

Father Bill: And then finally the one point I want to make is that sometimes we have a tension in the church between All Saints' Day, which we celebrate on November 1st, and All Souls' Day, which we celebrate on November 2nd. And one of the things that I think this time with us today, that we're going through in terms of this pandemic teaches us is that actually, there is a way in which the celebration of All Saints' overlaps with the celebration of All Souls'.

In fact, I would suggest that they are one this year as a special kind of liturgical melding of the calendar, because we've lost so many people in this city, in this region to COVID-19. And each of the people who have been lost, they were special to somebody. They were beloved by somebody. They had a witness to somebody and they mattered. And so on this day, in which we give, thanks for saints, we're reminded that saints are everywhere and saints are always among us. And so we are surrounded not only by saints with a capital "S" or a small "s," but every soul is a saint in the making.

Kate: Father Bill, are doctors part of the saints?

Father Bill: Yes. I've been thinking a lot about the doctors who have been caring for us over time. These are people who have taken on incredible risks so that we can live and survive this pandemic. I think about all the care workers in terms of the nurses that are helping us and continuing to keep us going. I think about every caregiver that has had to go through tremendous danger so that they can care for those of us who need care in the midst of this pandemic. They're the kind of people I have in mind when we give thanks for people on this day.

Kate: I love that. They're all kind of like superheroes.

Father Bill: They are like superheroes, but we're all called to be saints. One of my favorite passages in the Bible about saints happens in Ephesians 2:19-20. And this is a reminder to us of all of us being connected to Christ, who is the lodestone and holds us all together.

This is what we read.

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.”

I believe that saints remind us in one way or another, both by how they shine and how they maybe have some shadow sides. All of these saints remind us that Christ is the cornerstone of our faith. That Christ is our ultimate power and in our ultimate love in this world, that Christ as the Son of God has made sainthood become what it is because we are becoming like Him only more so ourselves at the same time.

Kate, you have a prayer that we can maybe finish with.

Kate: I do. I'm going to set Roxanne down for a second.

Father Bill: Yeah. Let her relax.

Kate: I think she's ready to move around a little bit.

Father Bill: Yes. That's good.

Kate: We'll come back to her in a second. Thanks, Roxanne.

Father Bill: Nice movement.

Kate: So Almighty God, by Your holy spirit, you have been made one with your saints in heaven and on earth. Grant that in our earthly pilgrimage, we may always be supported by this fellowship of love and prayer, and know ourselves to be surrounded by that witness, to your power and mercy. We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ, in whom all our prayers are acceptable through the Spirit and who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

Father Bill: And that, dear friends, is our first Bible Talk. We want to give thanks for our friends in Australia who have inspired us to teach in this way. I also want to give a special thanks to Roxanne as our guest animal of the lesson. Thank you, Roxanne. The tutu is amazing. Don't worry. You don't have to steer yourself towards me. You have done everything we need to be here. So thank you so much and have a wonderful All Saints' Day and All Souls Day. And have a wonderful weekend.

Kate: Thanks everybody. Bye.

[End of Video]

I hope that that was a blessing to you. It was a blessing to me. We hope to move into these Bible Talks for all ages as we move forward. Of course, there's no way we can say everything that needs to be said today when it comes to All Saints' Day and giving thanks for all those who have acted in godlike ways in our lives who we've lost over the past year. We're reminded of everybody who has done a kindness to all of us.

And I want to just share a couple of things with you today from the Beatitudes, because this past week, as I was trying to think about the Beatitudes and what they mean for us, it suddenly occurred to me that these Beatitudes, these blessed moments in which Jesus talked about obligations, which can sometimes seem far above our capabilities. These were actually all meant for us.

So when Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," He made this statement to His disciples, to people like you and me. And when Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit," He was speaking to people like you and me, people who were in the midst of being found to be spiritually bankrupt, to have been in a place of not having enough to give, to feeling themselves poor and impoverished spiritually. And the blessing of that blessing is that theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And when Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn," He is speaking to all of us who have been mourning over this past year, for they will be comforted is His promise. And when Jesus says - thank you so much, folks.

So, sorry, I don't know where to begin, to be honest with you, folks. I've never had that happen at this time. So thank you for your patience. I want to thank Kate Bell for the incredible work that she did on this video. I want to thank Roxanne and want to thank all of you for being here. And I just want to say a couple of things about the Beatitudes today, which is that these words are not meant to exist on a plane above ourselves, but these words are meant for us. No matter who we are, no matter where we are, no matter what we're struggling with, these words are for us.

And so I want to invite you today to hear and process and think to yourselves, these words that Jesus says on a mountain top are meant for you, no matter where you are, because when Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit, He's speaking to everybody who is experiencing any kind of spiritual poverty. For those of us who feel spiritually and morally bankrupt at this time, when we feel like we have given everything that we possibly could have. And the promise of this blessing is that in spite of all of that sense of insufficiency, God is more than sufficient. The Kingdom of Heaven is yours.

And for those of us who mourn and grieve this time in which we have had to grieve so much. And for so many people who are dear to us, we read, "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted." And for those of us who are experiencing some kind of challenge living in a polarized time in which there are so many people going back and forth, and there's so many ways in which we don't know who is speaking the truth and how they are speaking it, we receive another promise of Jesus, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." And the roots of the word "meek" there in Greek is gentleness. And one of the things that I've come to see in this congregation over the years is we have an incredible ability to be gentle with one another.

In 2016, when the election went away, that many people did not predict, one of the things that gave me such a heart for God and for this place was to see so many people being gentle with one another, the Republicans were gentle with the Democrats and no matter what happens at the end of this election, I have every hope and expectation and anticipation that we will yet be gentle with one another again, because the work that God has called us to do is to cross these divides and to bridge this distance and to join ourselves to one another, as members of the body of Christ in blood and in the love of Christ.

So for the meek, there is the promise that they will inherit the earth. May it be so for you. And as a way to get ourselves into that one more time, I want to lift up before you yet another performance by the Beatitudes by the Christ Church Choir in the Cranbrook Institute of Science.

[End of Recording]