**1st November 2020 All Saints Day**

**Call to Worship**

With a great cloud of witnesses around us,
we try to run the race of faith that lies ahead

Lives worthy of God who calls us into his kingdom and glory

**HYMN: For all the Saints**

**A prayer of approach**Jesus, help us to hear your call today.
Turn us outwards, beyond ourselves,
Help us to see as clearly as you do the needs that we could meet.
Stir in us a hunger and thirst for justice to be done,
and a readiness to live simply that others may simply live.
Grant us courage to face the bitterness, resentment and misunderstanding
that can come with following you.
Inspire us to be heralds of your kingdom
and the instruments of your love,
for the sake of the God who accepts us and grants us life in its fullness.
Amen.

***A prayer for forgiveness (Hebrews 12.1-2)***With a great cloud of witnesses around us,
we try to run the race that lies ahead.
Help us, God of truth, to lay aside every weight
and the sin that restricts our movement.
Forgive us for the times we have failed to clothe ourselves in love
and enable us to fix our eyes on Jesus,
in whom we have found our hope.
Amen.

Lord’s Prayer

**Dedication of Bench in memory of Ken Fullard**

**Jenny Henderson: testimony**

**Song: What a beautiful Name**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUBBIddm\_rM**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUBBIddm_rM)



**New Testament: 1 Thessalonians 2.9-13**

It’s All Saint’s Day today and All Soul’s Day tomorrow when we remember the saint’s past and present. It’s been a week when Britain has lost a number of celebrities: Sean Connery, Nobby Stiles to name but two. Bobby Ball died at the age of 76 this week after getting Covid-19. He was a popular TV comedian, most famous for his double act 'Cannon and Ball' with entertainment partner Tommy Cannon. He had the catchphrase: ‘Rock on Tommy’.

Both men became Christians after they achieved nationwide fame and Chris Gidney, who started the group 'Christians in Entertainment' became a close friend of theirs, writing their autobiography and going on 'gospel tours' with them.

He wrote the following tribute:[[1]](#endnote-1)

I still remember when Bobby Ball burned down the Chelsea apartment he was staying in while performing in a Pantomime at the London Palladium. Their summer seasons and pantomimes were sold out months in advance and starring live at the Palladium for many weeks was always a highlight. However, on this occasion, Bob was so focussed on the Palladium show that he left the chip pan still on the stove. By the time he came back several hours and two performances later, there was nothing left of the chip pan...or the flat!

Bobby was always such fun to be with. Always a joker, but with a serious side to him, he had a heart of gold and cared very much about others he met. When I was producing Bobby & Tommy's gospel shows, we would arrive at a theatre and Bob would go straight up to the crew and ask, "Are you a Christian then?" We all cringed, but I suppose Bob couldn’t understand how people got through life without faith, and wanted to share his faith in the same way that you would tell your friends about a bargain buy, or great film you'd just watched.

The gospel shows were a product of Bobby's passion to make sure everybody knew what Christianity offered, and what it had done for him personally. Before his conversion, Bobby was quite a wild and unpredictable person to work alongside. All of that changed when he gave his life to Christ in 1985. He had secretly met Rev Max Wigley, the theatre chaplain after the show one night, to ask what Christianity was all about. Despite all the new wealth, power and fame that Cannon & Ball had given him, Bob felt that something was missing from his life.

“Max and I talked for what seemed like hours. Amidst the tears, I poured out all the hurt, fear and guilt that had loaded me down for so long. We prayed and I handed my life over to God. It didn’t seem odd; in fact, it felt like something I should have done years earlier. I suddenly had a purpose for living,” recalled Bobby in the duo's autobiography *Rock On Tommy*.

Discovering Christ changed Bob so dramatically that his partner, Tommy, was completely thrown. Despite still working together, the duo hadn't been on speaking terms. But Bob went straight into Tommy's dressing room the next day and told his buddy what had happened. “The panicked look on Tom's face showed that he thought I had lost it,” said Bob.

One of the funniest moments was when Tommy walked into a backstage dressing room where I was praying with Bobby and a few others. We were sitting in a circle, all holding hands, and Tommy really thought we were all gay and crazy. Nevertheless, the change in Bob's behaviour had been so dramatic, that Tommy was keen to know more, and seven years later, he also gave his life to Christ. Bob was over the moon commenting that a rainbow had been put over their lives.

Bob was passionate about sharing his faith in every way he could, and his gift for weaving in comedy to his routines meant that he was listened to with great delight from audiences in the Gospel Tours that followed.

Bob was always so positive in his encouragement to others to look heavenward - and used to say things like “Don’t worry. Worry is a darkroom where negatives can develop.” He was quite a deep thinker and an excellent raconteur, as well as a good friend.

Whereas some in the showbiz world would keep their faith quiet, Bob was so transformed both personally and professionally by his faith he just wanted everyone to know about it. However, this didn’t stop him being one of the funniest guys around, which is why Tommy & Bobby remained at the top of the showbiz tree for so long. The thing I will always remember about Bobby was how laughter and faith were so entwined. He always said that laughter is God's medicine, and it’s the sort of prescription we need more than ever in these times. God’s gift to us of 'laughter makers' is precious, I am sure that Bobby has all the angels in fits of laughter right now.

"He was never ashamed of his faith in public because it has such an effect on him, a dramatic effect in his lifestyle and his family. And it changed it so much that he couldn't have one foot in the commercial camp and one foot in the Gospel camp. He was just like a stick of Blackpool rock - you break Bobby and the word Jesus runs all the way through the middle!

"He just wanted to tell everybody. I remember him saying something like, 'Look, if you go down to a local supermarket and they've got coffee on half price you tell your mates, you tell all your friends "Hey, get down to the supermarket! There's coffee on half price!"' he could not hold back talking about his faith and the difference it made."

As we continue our look at Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians Paul expresses his delight at these Christians and how he hopes his example of living among them and sharing the gospel has made a difference to their lives.

Paul demonstrates how fully he has embraced the way of Jesus, how deeply he understands that the medium and the message are one.[[2]](#endnote-2)

He shows us that we can only truly tell people the good news that God loves them by actually loving them ourselves.  Our evangelism must be deeply rooted in love for God AND love for those we are called to reach out to.  Otherwise we are just a sales force, with all the patter.  The gospel is costly to those sharing it, free to those receiving it.  The vulnerability of offering love can be very costly.  Ask any parent, sibling or friend.  Paul uses the imagery of the tender care of a breastfeeding mother, the fatherly nurture of character and life choices, the sibling relationships of living and working alongside each other to describe this love.  It is the day-to-day intimacy of lives shared, living out the gospel in the most ordinary ways, that gives the message of new life in Christ real meaning.

If communication is famously only 7% verbal, then not surprisingly it is against our lives, and the quality of our relationships, that our words will be tested.  Jesus shared his very self. Integrity and intimacy were his mission methods.  They were Paul’s.  Hopefully they are ours.

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that whoever does not have a good father should procure one. Of course, that is not everyone’s experience! Some have no experience of a father, let alone a good one! Nevertheless, Paul compares the way he has nurtured the Thessalonians to being a father. And he has used a variety of means to look after them. What are the ways in which we have been cared for within the church? Who has been like a good father to us, and in what ways?

In presenting the ways in which Paul and his colleagues have treated the Thessalonians, the writers are also presenting a model for others to follow – a model that worked then and may work now. There is value in reflecting on how believers can be encouraged, comforted and urged.

The central thing he wants them to do is. ‘literally, to ‘walk worthy of God’ (Verse 12).

The word ‘walk’ is a regular Pauline word for ‘behaviour’. What is your walk in life? Behaviour is seen as putting one foot in front of the other; good behaviour is taking care with the direction and placing of those feet. Walking lives worthy of God, who calls us into his kingdom and glory, suggest faith in God and a lifestyle worthy of the same living God.

Although this is All saint’s day – none of us are saints. None of us live like saints. It’s always fatal to start comparing ourselves with other people. I don’t drink and smoke. I don’t swear. I pay my taxes. I don’t beat my wife or my kids. I try to help others. Unlike so and so across the road…. If we want to compare with anyone – do it with Jesus. Then be humbled – because you will come no where near the saintliness of Christ. The song by Mac Davis says, ‘Oh Lord it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way’. It may be ‘tongue-in-cheek’, but it highlights the challenge to a self-important, arrogant person to show humility

Theologically we believe that those who put their faith in Christ are justified before God – God sees you in Christ – as sain6ts. Christ’s righteousness becomes yours. You are made right in god’s sight because of what Jesus has done for you on the cross bringing us the forgiveness of God for our sins.

But then let the Lord lift you up and walk with you, transforming you as you go. Theologically speaking this is the process of sanctification – made saintly by walking with Jesus through life. They say the company you keep is all important to shaping your character. Keep the company of Christ.

Paul wants to encourage, comfort, and urge the Thessalonians along this way.

He wants to encourage them like a sports coach telling his team how to win; He wants to comfort them like a friend strengthening someone facing a daunting task. He wants to urge them and to follow this utterly demanding way of life in Christ but ultimately rewarding way of life.

I’ve just been away for a week’s holiday meeting up with old friends from my university days 35 years ago now. We have been meeting up virtually every year since. This year with social distancing and the rule of six it was more challenging. WE have travelled along life’s road for some time now and we can be honest with each other. How is your walk going? These other guys are all Christians so we can ask how is your walk with the Lord? We can encourage, comfort and urge.

All the saints are in this together, so I hope you can find other Christians who will encourage you, comfort you and urging you on in the calling of God’s kingdom and glory. It’s absolutely vital for our walk with the Lord, that we also find others who will walk with us.

We give thanks for all those who have been saints to us and are saints to us now and we pray we too can be saints to others encouraging, comforting and urging others on to the calling God has for us.

**Prayers of intercession**

***A prayer of intercession***
Across the ages you, Jesus, have called women and men to follow you,
and to walk in the way of righteousness and truth.
We praise you for the witness of Christians in every generation,
for those who have served you,
those who taught the Gospel to the people,
for the ones who struggled for the poor and oppressed
and those who have died a martyr's death.

**Christ who calls us,**hear our prayer.

Bless your followers today, we pray.
We remember all who make sacrifices to serve you,
and your persecuted disciples in many lands.
Strengthen their faith in the time of need.
Grant them hope in the teeth of despair,
and the love that knows no boundaries.

**Christ who calls us,**hear our prayer.

Give to the world your deep peace,
and help us overcome the oppression and violence that destroys lives.
We pray especially for those nations tinged with hatred and injustice,
and look to a world in which all may have enough.

We pray for the United States of America as they come to elect a new President this week. Give them discernment and wisdom in choosing someone who will uphold your ways of dignity and justice and bring unity and heal divisions.

**Christ who calls us,**hear our prayer.

Comfort and hold all who are sick and sorrowing,
and give your wisdom and peace to those who care for them.
We pray especially for …

**Christ who calls us,**hear our prayer.

Teach us, each one, to follow you, Lord Jesus,
to be your disciples, the heralds of your kingdom.
Though we sometimes feel weary, strengthen us to persevere,
and so to run the race that lies before us,
in thankfulness and hope.

**Christ who calls us,**
hear our prayer.

And grant us the peace that comes in serving you.
**Amen.**

Today, we pray for all who feel isolated especially in this pandemic.
In their uniqueness, they may also feel alone.
This is most of us, some of the time,
but it is some of us most of the time.
God of encounter, may we all turn with love and interest
towards those who have been isolated.
God of encounter:
**hear our prayer. Amen.**



**HYMN: Ye Servants of God**

**NOTICES**

**A sending out prayer**

God of power and light,
you have called us into light and friendship.
Send us, now, into more light,
with more of the power of friendship.
This love is the love at the heart of all things –

that you call us friends.
Empower us in this friendship, this power, this glory.
**Amen**.

1. https://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/Bobby-Ball-1944-2020-Comedy-legend-evangelist-and-friend?utm\_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm\_medium=email&utm\_campaign=11927448\_Voice%20of%20Hope%2030%2F10%2F2020&utm\_content=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.premierchristianity.com%2FBlog%2FBobby-Ball-1944-2020-Comedy-legend-evangelist-and-friend&dm\_i=16DQ,73NA0,KCOFX7,SPB51,1 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *Dr Sam Richards, serving as Head of Children’s and Youth Work, member of mayBe community, Oxford.URC Devotions* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)