Matthew 5: 1-12 & 1 John 3: 1-3 All Saints 011126

The days feel shorter, the night is much more present than it seemed a few weeks ago.

We become more conscious of the night and the day, the darkness and the light.

Today the Church celebrates All Saints Day. This evening we remember All Souls, next week we mark Remembrance Sunday. The light and the darkness.

I want to talk about how our faith gives us strength in the times of light and the times of darkness in our lives.

All Saints day is an ancient Christian festival. It likely goes back to the persecution of Christians by the Emperor Diocletian in the 4th century.

It was born in the light of the hope of God's kingdom, and the darkness of persecution.

It is a time to give thanks for the believers in whose footsteps we tread, the worldwide Church of God in this time, and the glory of all the saints united with Christ at the making new of all things.

For many centuries Christians have used the examples of those who have gone before to remind them of our destiny to be with God.

"What we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this; when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we see him as he is." (John 3:2)

Winchester Cathedral - 6 mortuary chests containing the bones (they think) of early Anglo Saxon rulers and bishops. They are positioned visibly on top of the walls around the communion table.

A very visible sign - imagine coming up to communion and literally being surrounded by the remains of Christians who have gone before us.

Who are those in whose footsteps we walk?

Who have been the ones whose words, example and prayers have encouraged us to keep hold of our identity in Christ?

Grandad - faithful parish priest. Just up the road actually at St Saviour's Finsbury Park. He would talk about his ministry in Islington amidst bomb damage and the post war poverty of this borough, but also of the joy of ministering to the people of his parish and seeing God at work in their lives.

Another was Charles Wesley the famous hymn writer and co-founder of Methodism.

Charles knew the importance of keeping a hold of Christ in the midst of darkness and light.

Indeed that was made very real to him here at St Mary's.

1. The Preaching and the Demand for Credentials **(Late April 1739)**

Preaching Free Grace: Wesley was routinely preaching at St Mary's under Vicar George Stonehouse, expounding justification by faith. His passionate, evangelical style caused immediate ripples among the congregation and vestry.

On **April 27, 1739**, Wesley was called before the Islington vestry. The churchwardens formally demanded that he show a license from the Bishop of London allowing him to officiate in the diocese. Because Wesley was an unlicensed curate assisting Stonehouse informally, he could not produce one. The churchwardens explicitly forbade him from preaching in the church again.

2. Defiance and Spiritual Conviction **(April 28–30)** Vicar Stonehouse's Support: Vicar Stonehouse, sympathetic to Wesley and the revivalists, disputed the churchwardens' authority to ban his chosen curate without episcopal intervention and encouraged Charles to keep preaching.

Deepening Resolve: Wesley noted in his journal his determination not to let legalism or human intimidation override his call to proclaim the Gospel.

3. The Climax on the Pulpit Stairs **(May 1)** The Physical Confrontation: On May 1, 1739, Wesley arrived at St Mary's to preach. As he walked down the aisle toward the pulpit, he found the churchwardens waiting for him. They physically positioned themselves on the pulpit stairs, guarding the entrance to block him. Wesley refused to engage in a physical struggle or public scene, recording in his journal: "I was not inclined to fight my way through them." Instead, he stepped back, led prayers from the reading desk, and yielded the pulpit for the day.

4. The Final Vestry Resolution **(May 2–6)** Tensions Boil Over: Over the next five days, the churchwardens threatened legal proceedings against Vicar Stonehouse if he continued to permit the Wesleys or George Whitefield to speak.

May 6 (The Exclusion Order): The vestry met and passed the formal agreement explicitly prohibiting Charles Wesley, John Wesley, and George Whitefield from officiating or preaching in St Mary's church or churchyard ever again.

Two weeks later as Charles Wesley transitioned from a barred parish curate at St Mary's to an open-air evangelist—that he drafted the immortal lines of the hymn "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing".

To God all glory, praise, and love
be now and ever given
by saints below and saints above,
the Church in earth and heaven.

In the darkness of those two weeks Charles Wesley turned to worshipping God and in that reaffirmed his identity as a follower of Christ.

Notice how Jesus speaks in the Beatitudes. Almost every promise is in the future tense: they *will* be comforted, they *will* inherit the earth. Except for two. For the poor in spirit, and for those persecuted for righteousness' sake, Jesus changes his grammar.

He doesn't say 'theirs will be the kingdom of heaven.' He says: *theirs IS* the kingdom of heaven.

Not later. Now.

Our future hope as expressed in 1 John 3 demands present Kingdom action today.

Our future hope has to lead to us building God's kingdom of heaven in our present.

How to start?

Start with worshipping God and then encourage someone else in their faith.

It is so simple and yet so transformational.

Love God, love each other.

The two greatest commandments - Matthew 22.

In time of light and darkness in this life, All Saints day reminds us of the call to love God and love one another.

So that like Charles Wesley and many others we may join with

saints below and saints above,
the Church in earth and heaven.

To God all glory, praise, and love
be now and ever given