
The sermon text for today is based on the Gospel, Ephesians 1, verse 13.

Dress Code

There was a knock on the front door of our cottage, just as the clock chimed ten times. Eileen was out, meeting her friends at a café that morning, to knit and chat for a bit. Time flies when you're busy with gardening work and other odd jobs around the house. When I heard the knock on the door it suddenly occurred to me that my friend Martin was due to visit at ten o'clock. We had planned a morning-tea and a bit of a chat and sure enough, upon opening the front-door his smiling face couldn't be missed. However his friendly face soon vanished.

"What's wrong with you?" He asked. "I've put on my best shirt for you this morning. Just have a look at yours."

The shirt I wore that morning was not unlike the one I'm wearing at the moment, covered with numerous stains. It's a bit of a favourite shirt and very appropriate for gardening-work and other odd jobs around the house, like painting or repairs. Despite my inappropriate attire, I'm happy to report that we enjoyed a delightful morning-tea nevertheless. I did however make a promise; to wear my best shirt when visiting him in his home the next time.

How do you feel about my attire this morning?

I really don't have an excuse, do I? You haven't knocked on my front-door at home and surprised me. One could quite correctly describe my appearance as a deliberate act, a violation of a dress-code. I would normally come to church on a Sunday morning, wanting to look respectable, therefore wear something appropriate. The prophet Samuel encountered a somewhat similar problem, but in this case the six sons of Jesse were most likely well dressed, because God had sent him to his home, to anoint one of his son's as the new king of Israel. This is what God said to Samuel whilst looking at these six young men.

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

As you can see, my old stained shirt would raise quite a few eyebrows if I was to appear in public, perhaps shopping at the supermarket or worse still, be dressed like this going to the opera.

Dress Codes, no doubt we’ve all heard about these unwritten laws, which nevertheless impact our lives. Dress codes seem to be a set of rules which provides guidance to our correct attire during certain events or situations. Dress codes were created out of social perceptions and norms. These vary according to purpose, circumstances and occasions. For example, an employer will provide a dress code, expecting certain standards of attire. But dress codes can also be subject to human rights violations, making unfair demands on employees. Right now though, it appears that I am in violation of a dress code by wearing this attire on “All Saints Day”. But perhaps God does not view my appearance in such light.

Today we have gathered here to celebrated “All Saints Day.” Perhaps you already know this, but for those who don’t, “All Saints Day” was established by Pope Gregory III during his reign from 731 to 741AD when he dedicated a chapel in Rome in honour of all saints. It is also known as “All Hallows Day”, a day set aside to celebrate those Christians who achieved spiritual maturity.

Here is question for you, to ponder quietly for a moment.

How would you describe a “Saint”?

Please forgive me, but I’ve cheated and searched for the answer on the Internet. Here is one of a few definitions on offer.

If you refer to a living person as a saint, you mean that they are extremely kind, patient, and unselfish, such as “my wife is a saint to put up with me.”

Here is a more serious description. In religious belief, a saint is a person who is recognized as having an exceptional degree of holiness, likeness, or closeness to God. However, the use of the term “Saint” depends on the context and the various

denominations around the world. In Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and Lutheran doctrine, all of their faithful deceased in Heaven are considered to be saints, but some are considered worthy of greater honour.

Saint Valentine is one such example, the patron saint of love. He was born in modern-day Italy around 175AD. He was ordained a priest and later became a bishop. In more recent times in Australia, Mary MacKillop was declared a saint.

May I ask you another question, please? This question may appear to be quite unrelated at this point, but we shall connect the dots soon.

Are you familiar with anagrams?

Once again, I have cheated, and obtained the definition for the word “anagram” from the Internet.

“An anagram is a word formed by rearranging the letters of another word.”

For example, the word “rose” can also be spelled “sore.”

The word “rescue” can be spelled “secure”

The word “Saint” is also an anagram, but more of that later, other than to say that our world is filled with anagrams and I encourage you to find some during the following week, because it may remind you of your identity.

Puzzled?

Well, today we are celebrating “All Saints Day”, and thus we are remembering the saints of the church. You and I, we are also saints, but our sainthood is not the result of extraordinary pious deeds or behaviour. God, of course, does desire our best behaviour during our lives, but religious performances, no matter how exceptional these may be, these do not bring about our elevation to sainthood. Our sainthood is actually a precious gift from God, because he loves us so much that he gave his only son, Jesus Christ, to die on a cross for our sins.

We can't save ourselves. It is God, who saves us, through Jesus Christ and when that happens, that process is known as being "SAINTED". I use this word for a very deliberate reason, because the word "SAINTED" is also an anagram.

For those who regularly play word games, you will easily recognise that the letters used in the word "SAINTED" are the same as in the word "STAINED"

"Stained" becomes "Sainted" just as the word "Stain" can change to "Saint." And all this is due to the power of God, who has rescued you and me from our state of sin and saved us to be his holy people.

There is only one who can save us from all our sinful stains, and that is Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. We can't do it ourselves, even if I was to wear my finest Sunday clothes. (Werner will now take off his stained shirt and reveal to the congregation a spotless white cotton shirt, which he wore underneath the stained one)

Each one of us is a saint, yes, you and I, as today's text in the letter to the Ephesians clearly states. "YOU ALSO WERE INCLUDED IN CHRIST."

Our salvation is a precious gift from God, who loves us very much, so much that he sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins on a cross. In doing so God opened the gate of heaven's door for you and me, his saints.

I encourage you to wear a stained shirt or dress during the following week, to remind yourself that God considers you his saints here on earth, each one of us with a very responsible task, to love God and our neighbour, because our world is in need of peacemakers.

And may the peace of god that surpasses all human understanding keep your hearts and mind safe in Christ

Amen