

All Saints Sunday A 2017

Revelation 7:9-17

Psalm 34:1-10, 22

1 John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12

It was spring
In the beautiful city of Budapest.
In the girls' home
Of the Scottish Mission School,
A little girl named Agnes
Watched as her beloved teacher Miss Haining
Walked to the door.
Miss Haining turned and smiled at her,
And said,
Don't worry.
I'll be back by lunchtime.
Then the Gestapo took her away.
Agnes never saw her again.

The year was 1944.
Jane Haining,
A Church of Scotland missionary
Had refused to leave her post
When the Nazis invaded Hungary.
She was matron of the school,
And watched over the 30 girls who boarded there,
Many of them Jewish.
She and other teachers
Had smuggled as many girls as they could to safety.
She would not leave the rest,
Many of whom were orphans.
Herself a motherless child,
It had always been her vision
To be the matron of a girls' home,
And she was a mother
To those in her care.
If these children need me in days of sunshine,
She said,
How much more do they need me in days of darkness?

When she was arrested,
Eight charges were brought against her.
The second was that she had been seen to weep
As she helped her Jewish students

Sew yellow stars to their coats.
If they had known,
Her accusers might have added this charge as well:
When she was ordered to return home to Scotland,
And refused to leave,
She cut up her suitcases
And used the leather
To patch the soles of her girls' worn out shoes.

Jane was taken to Auschwitz,
Where she died two months later.
Six of her students died there as well.
Two returned.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In Jane's birthplace, the village of Dunscore,
Her monument says
Heroic Christian Martyr.
By Jews
She is numbered
As one of the Righteous among the Nations,
Her name inscribed on the wall
Of the Garden of the Righteous
At Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Annette, one of her girls who returned from Auschwitz,
Remembers Miss Haining taking them for a walk
every day after lunch at school.
I loved our daily walks, she says,
They gave us a chance to laugh and feel free.
Another remembers
That when there were air raids,
Miss Haining always had a little treat for them in the shelter,
A piece of chocolate or some other sweet.

We always hoped,
Says Annette,
That the freedom and acceptance within the circle of our school
Were the truth of our reality,
Rather than the persecution and hatred
That surrounded us outside of school.
Says another girl,
She always loved us all the same.
She made no difference between us.

That's the world of the saints,
Those who live in the world of blessedness
And create a circle of freedom and acceptance
Even when they are surrounded
By persecution and hatred.

Do the saints pretend
That everything is fine,
When all around them
Is confusion, fear,
Hatred and persecution?

No, they see more clearly than anyone
Injustice,
Hardness of heart,
Resentment,
Systemic cruelty and oppression.
They don't pretend the days of darkness
Are days of sunshine.

They see the darkness and confront it –
And see through it to the light that is always there.

The saints are those who still believe
In the blessedness that is deeper,
Broader,
More enduring than the pain.
The saints continue to trust
That there is an unquenchable source of goodness
An inexhaustible wellspring of love,
That will nourish and refresh them
No matter what.
In the words of Annette,
Jane's student who survived Auschwitz,
Freedom and acceptance are the truth of their reality,
Rather than persecution and hatred.

Are the meek inheriting the earth yet?
Is there comfort for those who mourn?

But –
Can you believe
That the comfort, the fulfillment,
The kingdom of heaven,
Are the deeper,

Truer reality of our lives?

The saints believe that.

And we are the saints.

When we undertake the Christian life,
When we renew our baptismal vows,
We commit to the life of the saints.
The life of the blessed.

We promise to be faithful
In prayer and worship,
In lifelong formation,
And intentional community.

We commit to a life of ongoing self-examination,
Repentance, and reconciliation.

We promise to let our words and actions
Show that God has made a difference in our lives.

We commit to seeking and serving
the holy one
In everyone.

Jane Haining dedicated her life
To living into vows like these.
The faithfulness to prayer and worship,
To lifelong learning and community,
To the ongoing work of repentance and reconciliation,
Gave her the strength and the will
To love her neighbors as herself,
So that she risked her life
To remain with the children in her care,
To find them food and clothing,
To create for them times of laughter and freedom,
To turn to them with a smile of reassurance,
Before going to her death.

The heroism of Jane Haining
Is not the only way to be a saint.

But for each of us,
For all of us together,
There are daily choices,

Daily discernments,
Daily acts of will, of compassion,
Of hope, of courage.

Our time is not her time,
But we have our own challenges.
Our own chances
To live into the fullness
Of our baptismal vows.

To believe in the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven,
And work to bring it here and now,
To let it show forth now,
To live in it now,
And invite everyone and anyone
To join us in the circle.



Jane Haining 1897-1944