

Local Saints

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church November 1st, 2020 – Matthew 5:1-12 & Rev 7;9-17)

A child was once asked – What is a saint? Their answer – one that the light shines through. Sure, they might have been thinking of stained-glass windows. However, there is truth in the answer, a saint is one that God's light shines through.

Today is All Saints Day, a day when we celebrate the lives of and the influence on us. of those, we call saints and shortly we shall celebrate communion, that meal which in some mysterious way connects the faithful down through the ages.

I thought this morning I might share with you a brief survey of some local saints, people from different backgrounds, different eras but all who did what they could, to live out the beatitudes of which Jesus spoke on the sermon on the mount, which was read to us earlier in the service.

So, let me introduce them to you.

1. Mary MacKillop



Painting by Sr M Brady OP

Mary was born in Fitzroy in 1842.¹ Initially the family did well and then for some reason became impoverished. She became a teacher in Portland. Early in her life she felt called to the religious life, along with a Catholic Priest they set up the order “Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart” – the order meant they would live in poverty and dedicate themselves to educating poor children. She encountered some power issues, perhaps because the order became too popular, and was excommunicated for insubordination. Charity to neighbour was one of her most outstanding virtues. She is Australia's first ‘official saint’. Blessed are those who are merciful.

2. Hannah Martin

I was first introduced to Hannah's story by Rev Mervyn Himbury who described her as the ‘chook lady’. Hannah was the wife of James Martin who was the minister at Collins Street Baptist Church in the 1870's. Rev Simon Holt recently described her as a woman of ability and influence.² She led the church into ministry with the most marginalized people in town – mostly who lived down around what is now the Southern Cross Station. She would put on her cloak and underneath it would put chickens, which she would then take with her and distribute to the poor, down at the

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MacKillop, Mary Helen (1842–1909) by Osmund Thorpe **This article was published in Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 5, (MUP), 1974**

² From Sermon by Rev Dr Simon Holt in 2017, Other information gained from my personal conversations with Rev Mervyn Himbury in the early 2000's.

bottom end of Collins Street, no doubt upsetting the sensibilities of those at the top end of Collins Street. Hannah had little interest in the role of a traditional pastor's wife. Her vision and calling were much broader. Though her efforts came under increasing public criticism, the church in her time redoubled its efforts and became one of the most active communities in Melbourne in service to the imprisoned, the disabled and the poor.³ Blessed are those who show mercy.

3. Joseph Goble

We know this man well. He served this church twice. The second time through the First World War and the Great Depression. Born in Portland it appears he was abandoned by his father, he and his mother and brother moved to Port Melbourne where they lived in poverty. He was converted to Christianity at the Mission to Seamen. He had the biggest Sunday School in Victoria at his time in Footscray and would preach in the evening to more than 2000 in a local hall. A stirring preacher with a good sense of humour. He held positions in both the Baptist Union of Victoria and also the Baptist Union of Australia. More importantly it was his work with the people of Footscray that is most significant. Pedalling on his reinforced bike he offered care, he gave most of his money to the poor and upon his death the following was written in 'The Mail' – His life was a period of delightful ingenuousness, touching kindness and healing sympathy. His heart was overflowing with love and good cheer. ... He limited his consumption, took a minimal stipend and discretely distributed most of his money to the poor. (*from The Mail, Footscray, 6th February 1932*). He lived a life of practical Christianity derived from an understanding of the Good Samaritan. Sometimes called the 'Bishop of Footscray', loved so much the community erected a statue of him on Geelong Road which still stands today. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice.



Photographs supplied by Kent Watson

4. Harry York, Stan Baker & Nan Rynhart

These three people were in the congregation at Moreland when I served there. Harry and Nan lived into the 100's, Stan into his late 90's.

Harry was an absolute gentleman. A man who lived with his father after his mother had abandoned them, as a child he tried to run away to Sydney to find her. He worked his whole life the Australia Post. After service in World War II he helped establish the Pascoe Vale RSL. Harry lived out his faith quietly, he was a peace-loving man. He had a heart of gold and gave to many charities without fanfare. His war experience ensured that he would do anything for peace, he rarely spoke in church meetings but he would speak up if he thought people were being unjust. Blessed are the peacemakers.

Stan also saw service in the Middle East in World War II. He grew up in Kerang as a boy but after the war he built his own house in Melbourne. He was a great gardener and also made me a rusty nail cross which I have with me, the last one he ever made. He spent his retirement potting and repotting plants which he sold making

³ Ibid, Rev Dr Simon Holt sermon, 2017

thousands of dollars to support the chaplain at the local school. He taught Sunday school and cared for his wife who lived with dementia until she disappeared at the beach never to be seen again. Gripped by grief few of us could understand he never lost his faith. Stan had an earthy faith to match his large, gnarled hands which saw so much work for others. Blessed are those that mourn.

Nan was a dynamo, walking everywhere, playing tennis and bowls well into her old age, she knitted, taught Religious Education for years in local primary schools. Fiercely independent, wise and practical, a no-nonsense woman who was the first female deacon at the church (and probably one of the first in the denomination). She knew her faith, was somewhat of a theologian. Blessed are the pure in heart.

Three ordinary yet extraordinary saints.

5. Katherine (Caz) Perrin & Trish Knell

Caz and Trish were members of the Brunswick Baptist Church.

Upon her return from missionary service Caz became the governor of the newly created Fairlea Women's Prison shortly after it opened in the 1950's. Her goal was to provide positive rehabilitation within a conducive environment, enabling the woman prisoner to 're-enter the world as a citizen'. She was supported by her friend and influential social activist Mrs (later Dame) Phyllis Frost, and by the Victorian Women's Prison Council. ⁴ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice.

Trish died last month. I knew her and was proud to have known and worked with her. This is what I wrote upon hearing of her death, which tells a little of her story and who she was.

A Capable Woman our Trish (Proverbs 31)

Trish was a woman of great adventure - she amazed when she spoke of nursing in the outback in WA at Lenora

Trish was a woman of great faith - she loved her Lord and sought his wisdom in her living and speaking

Trish was a woman of surprises - she amazed me when we were speaking of a preacher who used images drawn from science fiction, which I didn't understand, she told me of her love of science fiction

Trish was a woman of great prayer - she amazed with her deep yet simple prayers she prayed in the vestry before I led or preached at a service

Trish was a woman of practicality - making meals for the Omid group, ensuring they would contain ingredients they would like

Trish was a woman of great encouragement - she encouraged me in my work and in my role as a deacon, encouraging me to speak up

Trish was a woman whom I was truly honoured to have known for the last 15 years or so. I will miss her little giggle, her warm hugs and her gentle wisdom.

May she rest in peace, safe in the arms of her Lord.

⁴ Russell, E., Fairlea: the history of a women's prison in Australia 1956-1996, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 1998.

Blessed are those who show mercy.

Two ordinary and yet extraordinary saints.

6. Trevor Bradley

And now to our own Trevor. I look forward to many of you adding your own reflections to my understanding of this man.

Trevor had studied theology and a quick look of his books suggests to me that he was quite forward thinking. He led bible studies and was very committed to the church leading Sunday devotions at Westhaven. He was involved in the local palliative care network and had mentored pastors at this church. Many of you can add stories I am sure about his deep faith and care of others both young and old. Blessed are those who show mercy.



Another ordinary and yet extraordinary saint.

All of these people took their faith seriously, they transformed lives and communities. They lived out the beatitudes. They dared to live differently. There were ordinary and yet extraordinary followers of Jesus. We are deeply connected to them. They are our examples, mentors and inspiration. They challenge us to live out the beatitudes. Let's give thanks for their lives, celebrate the way they influenced others and go and do likewise.