

**All Saints Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2017. Canongate Kirk.**

**Isaiah 51: 1** *Look to the rock from which you were hewn.*

Although the Reformation did not become official in Scotland until 1560, and despite drawing more significant influence from the teaching of John Calvin in Switzerland than that of Martin Luther in Germany, there is no doubt that the latter's defiant action in nailing what have become known as his 95 theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1517 marked the start of the process that would lead eventually to the establishment of the Church of Scotland. *Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.* On this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we need look no further. Our text from Isaiah's prophecy is preceded by an equally appropriate sentence, Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Because it was the pursuit of righteousness, the need to do what was right, that prompted Luther to make his stand in the first place. Here I stand, he was to say elsewhere, I can do no other. It was over the business literally of indulgences that he was to make his stand, objecting to, protesting about the common practice of the clergy selling indulgences to the people, by which transactions they believed they could secure absolution. The more money you paid the church, the more forgiveness you were guaranteed both in this world and the next. It was all wrong and it had all got totally out of control and Martin Luther could suffer it no longer. Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, he might well have said, you that seek the Lord. Not your own comfort and consolation bought at whatever price you can afford. *Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug.*

It sounds like Isaiah himself was anxious to refocus the people, to remind them of how it all began with Abraham and Sarah, and of the source of true comfort and consolation that could be found in God alone – for the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places. And will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. Similarly it is to the sermon on the mount in St Matthew's Gospel, and not least the first 12 verses, that generations of Christian people have come back time and time again to refocus themselves and to re-establish their priorities in their own pursuit of righteousness, in their own seeking the Lord. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. *Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug.*

Those Scottish martyrs who suffered and died in the years between 1517 and 1560 might well have found consolation there. *Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* This month marks not just the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in Germany but the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution in Russia, in which cause lives were also lost and martyrs made. But as we focus on the revolution that was the Reformation, let us refocus ourselves not just on that which was nailed to the door, but on Him who was nailed to the cross, and find in his eternal sacrifice the true source of our forgiveness. *Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug.* And now may God bless to us this preaching of his most holy word, and to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all praise and glory now and forever.

Amen.