

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2017**  
**Christ the King (A)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Ezekiel 34.11-16,20-24**

**NT: Ephesians 1.15-end**

**G: Matthew 25.31-end**

### **The Judgment of the Nations**

- Jesus speaks of judgement with a story about the separation of sheep from goats.
- The judgement will take place when the Son of Man comes in glory.
- Those who failed to see and respond to the needs of people around them, have failed to see the Son.

Judgement' is an unpopular concept these days. It is a very negative thing, and we are more used to being told not to judge. So the idea of God or Jesus as judge is abhorrent to many. But today's reading says that we are judged, not by others, not even by God, but by our own actions or lack of them. In the course of our lives, we determine which side of the divide we will be on by our attitude to other people. Jesus simply points out the inevitable.

These verses from Matthew's Gospel are part parable, part prophecy and part eschatological discourse (teaching about the end of the world). The outward form of the account follows on from the story about wise and foolish young girls scheduled to accompany a bride to her wedding feast and the employees of an employer absent for some time who entrusts his wealth to their care in his absence; all three point beyond the story format to challenge the followers of Jesus to be ready for His unexpected coming; to prepare for His unannounced return, that is in the sense that none of us knows even the approximate date of His return;

The message is set in a rural scene in which a shepherd gathers his flock of sheep and goats together and separates them for the night. The sheep in that context were happy to sleep outside with their thicker woolly coats, whereas the goats less well insulated against the cooler air preferred to have a more sheltered place to sleep.

However, it needs to be noted that sheep and goats in Israel in Jesus' day were very similar in appearance. To an outsider it was not easy to tell them apart. This is not the case with sheep and goats in the United Kingdom today. The point of this choice of animals is deliberate. We may not know someone else's spiritual state but Jesus does and on the Day of Judgement He will not make any mistakes. He knows those who are His and those who have consciously turned their backs on Him.

On that day He will confirm the choices made in this life to follow or to turn away from Him. The teaching of Jesus in this passage not only makes a clear distinction between the saved and the lost, it also draws attention to the rewarding of the saved for their honouring of Jesus in their daily lives. This is a reward unsought and unexpected. It is not a parable teaching salvation by works, but a vivid warning that one day we will stand before King Jesus to give an account of our lives here on earth, good or bad, so be ready to account then for the life we are now living on earth.

The parable of the sheep and goats points to the ultimate separation of the good and the wicked, developing the ideas already found in the parable of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43) and the net (Matthew 13:47-50). However, the reference to the sheep and the goats is hardly more than a momentary comparison, prior to Matthew moving us on to develop the overwhelming theme of judgement.

One striking feature of this story is the way the king, the Son of Man, identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. He speaks of

them as 'these brothers and sisters of mine' and explains to his surprised hearers, 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

With these words, the parable is correctly seen as Jesus' classic statement of Christian social responsibility.

Judgement will be on the basis of whether we love our neighbour as ourselves, 'our neighbour' defined in the parable of the Good Samaritan as anyone in need (Luke 10:25-37).

Ultimately, this parable brings out clearly the importance of a vital relationship with God and an expression of good works in the Christian life as a mark of true commitment to Christ.

Christ will be met within the Church as the Church allows Christ to reign within the Church.

What does the reign of Christ the King look like? The reading from Ezekiel encourages God's people to trust that God's reign is personal and persistent.

In Jesus view of the kingdom, it is always near, ready to break through the barriers of every day and seize us, impel us, embrace us, challenge us.

We don't need to wait for the kingdom or ask when it will come. The kingdom appears in ordinary daily events: a confused child, a sick friend, a discouraged spouse, a troublesome person on the phone, a demand that seems unfair but where we can do much good with little effort. These are the places when we should be prepared to show and experience God's loving power.

The sheep would have known what they did, the kind actions which they had performed. Nevertheless the sheep were surprised at their being told that Christ Himself was the personal object of all their deeds.

They did not know that they found Him hungry, and supplied Him with food. Neither did they know that they brought water to Him, and slaked His thirst; that seeing Him naked and shivering, they put warm clothing upon Him, paid Him visits when lying in prison for the truth, and sat by His bedside when laid down with sickness.

The duties which they performed they had done to help others and Jesus sees in these actions care of his children as though it were care of himself. One of the wonderful things about these actions are that they are the sorts of things which we can all perform. You do not need to be special to be kind to the sick. Jesus did not say I was sick and you healed me; or in prison and you set me free; but you visited me and came unto me."

This is ordinary but real, personal service of Christ, we can all do it, but it involves sacrifice of ease, time and property..." There are those who do not recognise need in others. Our hardness of heart to others can become so much a part of our lives that we are unmoved. It is possible to be desensitised to things around us. To become unaware that we are sharp, abrupt or difficult to others. Or we can live cocooned in an environment of personal comfort and security so that we fail to understand the plight of others.

If we are prepared to have our eyes opened then we can all too easily find situation of want and need. If we seek to have occasions when we can be of help to others then they are all too apparent. Frequently our notices advertise the opportunities to give of our time and talents in the service of others, from carol singing to cooking.

God's kingdom is not a place, it is a relationship, we enter into that relationship when we behave as Christ has commanded us, when we are obedient to him. And so we come to the realisation that to help those in need and to serve others is to place ourselves firmly on the road to heaven, to enter into the joy of our Lord.

As we prepare during Advent for the coming of Christ the King we should prepare ourselves to experience his kingdom in the here and now and in the everyday.

Fr Bill Addy