

**22/11/20 – Christ the King**

**Preacher: Shirley Dudeney, Licensed Lay Minister**

Matt 25:31-end & Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Lord, Take my words and make them yours,  
so that each of us would hear from you. Amen.

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Today we come to the end of the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel...and oh dear, it's a challenging read.

Let's have a recap.

Two weeks ago at the beginning of this chapter we encountered the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids with it's message to 'be prepared'.

Then last week we heard the parable of the Talents with it's warning of 'that we were required to be generous'

And now, today we find ourselves confronted with what's variously referred to as 'The Final Judgement'; 'The Judgement of the Nations'; 'God's standard of Judgement' and the 'story of the Sheep and the Goats'

That phrase 'sheep and goats' has entered our everyday language and this story is perhaps too well know...we've heard it before and it's easy I would suggest to react in one of three ways;

As we are familiar with this story of Jesus separating the sheep from the goats;

separating those who have feed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, taken care of the sick or visited the person in prison,

from those who didn't feed the hungry, didn't give drink to the thirsty, didn't welcomed the stranger, didn't cloth the naked, didn't take care of the sick or didn't visited the person in prison

its easy to switch off ...oh I've heard this before...I know what's coming...I'll think about something else

OR

This is a passage that can leave us paralysed...thinking I don't get the opportunity to do these things...I'm going to end up with the goats

OR

It can encourage us to start judging ourselves and others

Well I hope that you haven't switched off yet and will join me in finding another way to read this passage.

The first verse reads

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory' –

this gives us the first hint that this passage is not about judging ourselves or others –  
it's all about when the Son Of Man, when Jesus appears in glory; when he is enthroned as judge...  
the judging of ourselves and of others is His role not ours.

So that dispenses with the idea that this passage should prompt us to either judge ourselves or others.

As it says earlier in Matthew's Gospel...judge not, so that you may not be judged.

So what about the potential reading of this passage which can leave us paralysed because we don't get the opportunities to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, take care of the sick or visit the person in prison.

This is perhaps a particular danger in this time of Covid restrictions and also as we get older and our life opportunities become reduced.

Well, perhaps the first thing to be said is that this is not a tick list of things to be done

And perhaps the second thing is to remind our ourselves of what is sometimes referred to as the golden commandment

Love God; Love your neighbour

The key word here is

Love

Any action which we take should be an expression of our love for God and love for our neighbour.

It should be uncalculating

The sheep in the story didn't realise that they were helping Jesus, they simply did what they did their of love for the person

So its not the act itself which is important, it's the motivation behind the act

It doesn't matter how limited our circumstances, as long as we are looking for opportunities to love God and to love our neighbour and acting with love when those opportunities arise then we can be confident that we are serving Christ.

Two stories from the saints illustrate this.

First there was Francis of Assisi; he was wealthy and high-born and high spirited. But he was not happy. He felt his life was incomplete. Then one day he was out riding and met a leper, loathsome and repulsive in the ugliness of his disease. Something moved Francis to dismount and fling his arms round the leper. As he did so the face of the man changed to the face of Christ.

The other was Martin of Tours. He was a Roman soldier and a Christian. One cold winter day, as he was entering a city, a beggar stopped him and asked for alms. Martin had no money; but the beggar was shivering with the cold, so Martin gave him what he had. HE took off his soldier's coat, cut it in half and gave half to the beggar.

That night he had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places and all the angels and Jesus among them...and Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldiers cloak.

One of the angels said to him; Master, why are you wearing that cloak? Who gave it to you?

And Jesus answered softly 'My servant Martin gave it to me'

So let be encouraged by this passage

which reminds us that as we serve others,

in whatever way,

however small or simple the act,

we are serving Christ.

Amen