

St Columba Church
Sunday 22nd November 2020
Christ the King Sunday
Gospel Reading Matthew 25:31-46

Today's reading from St Matthew's Gospel celebrates **Christ King Sunday** and is the last Sunday of the Church year. Next week we begin the church year with the four Sundays of Advent.

It is also referred to as 'Stir Up Sunday' synonymous with Christmas puddings! The great cry '*stir up*' was a reminder to congregations to get the Christmas pudding made in plenty of time to mature before Christmas. As a child I remember there was also added an old thrupenny piece wrapped in greaseproof paper and whoever got it on their plate on Christmas day would get worldly riches heaped on them!.

The Feast of Christ the King first came into the church calendar several years after the horrors of the first Great War when the Christian world encountered the rise of secularism and totalitarianism throughout much of Europe with the

rise of dictators who often attempted to assert authority over the Church and sought to lessen the Church's power to proclaim Christ's reign on earth.

And we can see today the same distrust of authority with the rise of individualism with the idea of Christ as ruler rejected in a strongly individualistic system and culture. After the Great War the Proclamation of Christ as King was intended to assert the power of Christ in the world, over the power of war, over the power of dictatorship and totalitarianism – and we now have its post-modern equivalence of Globalisation with its obsession with consumerism and materialism. And it is into today's culture that the timeless teaching of Jesus speaks. I want to suggest three things:

1. The first thing is that Jesus asks us to do something that is well within our capability.

There is something immediately attractive in this parable that we find ourselves instantly responding to. We feel the essential truth of it - of helping one another along the way. And the older we become,

the more we see the truth of this in our own lives – the more so as leaders and peoples across the world struggle to understand and combat the present corona virus pandemic.

St Matthew tells us that Jesus is coming to the end of his teaching life, before He goes towards Jerusalem and His crucifixion he says *'Look what I have said is serious; this is important, listen to what I say because there are consequences.'* In an age when so much is about how we feel, Jesus teaches us that it is our wills, rather than our feelings, that governs our actions.

The English poet, John Milton, wrote in the 17th Century and in his poem, Lycidas, he complains of the widening gap between those in power and the poverty-stricken population, whom he compares to hungry sheep – ***“The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed”***. But we might say today: ***“what if the sheep don't look up any more?”*** What if there is no spiritual hunger in the land? What then for the Nation, for the world, for the Church?

The good news is that the challenge which Jesus gives can be fulfilled by anyone. He mentions six deeds of mercy. They are not meant to be comprehensive; rather they show that Jesus is concerned by specific material acts of kindness towards the needy. We don't need lots of money to give away; we don't need to find a cure for Cancer; He simply tells his followers to be kind to one another. Look after the poor, visit the sick, give food to the hungry. We can all do this, and in so doing we become a part of building Christ's Kingdom on earth.

e.g. Bayard Taylor, the 19th century American poet and travel writer, says:

The healing of the nations is in its nameless saints. Each separate star seems nothing, but a myriad scattered stars break up the night and make it beautiful

2. The second thing to note is that this help must be quite uncalculating.

In the story Jesus tells, those who are rewarded are surprised, because they had no idea that their acts of kindness were noticed. They were motivated only by mercy, not by greed, or for reward.

Those (the righteous) who helped did so because they couldn't help themselves from helping. It was natural, instinctive; it was part of their on-going Christian experience.

John Steinbeck, the American writer said; *'if you want to destroy a nation, give it too much, make it greedy...'* It is now readily accepted that globalisation has been good for the rich nations and devastating for the poor.

The bible lesson tells that all will be judged by God - and notice it's not in a court of law - but rather that we self-select ourselves into sheep and goats - by those who have done good and people who have failed to do good.

3. The third thing to note is that Jesus confronts us with the truth that all such help which is

given - is given to Himself and by implication all such help which is withheld, is withheld for Himself.

In our prayers we invite God to be among us - in our lives and often we fail to see Him because we are looking for exceptional spiritual interventions of God! But the core of Jesus' teaching here is that Christ is more among us than we think he is. And sadly we don't recognise it. We fail to realise it. How does God answer prayer - but through us? How does God meet the need of the needy?

e.g. Beth Webb a poet and children's writer, has a simple verse of poetry that says something about our approach to Christian practice today. She's speaking about a young woman who goes to her work each day and as she passes the convent she genuflects to the church.

*She passed the convent every day,
And genuflected outside the chapel,
For God was in there*

In a gilded box.

She passed the homeless every day

But did not genuflect

She did not notice that God was there,

In a cardboard box.

So for us, we know that we are called to the service of others, we are also called to work to change oppressive systems and human structures that fail to serve the needy and work against relieving troubled lives and broken spirits. God calls us to take the resources he has given us and use them for the good of all, and to be considerate of the plight of the weak and powerless.

On Christ the King Sunday we must decide to show that Jesus Christ is our King and we must do so by having the courage and the commitment to become more and more a part of the reign of God in our present world to build His Kingdom.