

Sunday 22nd November 2020

Opening Prayer

We have been called into the pastures of God, where there is nurture, a place to rest, safety, and kindness among all.

Let us draw near, in the goodness of God, to be with each other, and to praise the shepherd who has gathered us here. **Amen.**

Hymn Christ triumphant, ever reigning (Michael Saward) (CCL license: 256444) (You can find the tune by clicking [here](#) and perhaps join in)

**1. Christ triumphant, ever reigning, Saviour, Master, King.
Lord of heav'n our lives sustaining hear us as we sing:
Yours the glory and the crown, the high renown, eternal name!**

**2. Word incarnate, truth revealing, Son of Man on earth!
Pow'r and majesty concealing
By Your humble birth:**

**3. Suff'ring Servant scorned, ill-treated, Victim, crucified!
Death is though the cross defeated, sinners justified:**

**4. Priestly King, enthroned forever high in heav'n above!
Sin and death and hell shall never Stifle hymns of love:**

**5. So, our heart and voices raising
Through the ages long, ceaselessly upon You gazing,
this shall be our song:
Yours the glory and the crown, the high renown, eternal name.**

Prayer of Approach

We come to you,

people who are hungry,

people who are thirsty,

strangers, imprisoned, exposed,

knowing that you have come to us, too,

in these same guises.

In our brokenness, welcome us.

And open up our defences as we come to you, O Lord of many guises. **Amen.**

Bible Reading: Matthew 25:31 -46

Reflection

I don't know if you have spent time during lockdown decluttering. Perhaps you've explored what is in the loft or the garage or you have sorted through your clothes or papers. If you've been successful, then some things will have been thrown out and some will have been kept. You will have made judgments about the value of the different items. But these will be nothing as significant of the God's Final Judgement as today's bible passage is sometimes called.

Over the last few weeks (since Pentecost), we have looking at various stories and teachings of Jesus that we find In Matthew's Gospel starting with the Beatitudes in chapter 5. After today's reading from chapter 25, Matthew goes on to describe the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion and we will leave him there as we start next week with Advent!

God's judgement is likened to separating sheep from goats. Not too difficult a call to make; most sheep and goat look different. However, God is sorting the righteous from the others. The righteous are rewarded as the King (Jesus) says "Come you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the kingdom that was prepared for you ever since the creation of the world." This is God's eternal kingdom that the righteous will inherit.

But the big surprise is when you hear what it is that distinguishes the righteous and the non-righteous. Think for a moment what you would might think makes a person righteous in God's eyes. You might say that they must be believers, faithful followers of Jesus, call themselves Christians. However, the separation is made on the basis of what people did and not their beliefs or faithfulness.

What counts is whether they were either doing or refusing to do acts of kindness and compassion. It is not just sufficient to recognise the person in need but to see Jesus in that person and be compelled to do something. The question is how much of the act done to the hungry and thirsty person must be a conscious act done for Jesus, and how much of it might be an instinctive action that we undertake in response to need, however and whenever we encounter it. What the king in the story seems to praise is the instinctive response to human need and not even whether we were doing it consciously as our Christian duty. What matters is our openness to respond compassionately to human need as Chris would have done.

Perhaps our attitudes and response to people in need should be based on the prayer of Teresa of Avila (1515-82):

"Christ has no body on earth now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on the world; yours are the feet with which he walks to do good; yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world."

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Yours is the earth and all within it.

The valleys, mountains, seas and spray;

the land, the pastures, the trees and fauna.

All around us, we see stories of your bounty,

your exuberant goodness, your flourishing provision. You have made us to live here, nurtured by this earth, and by work.

We find joy in this vocation, to be your people, living, working, resting, supporting.

We thank you for the gifts of living,

and for these gifts of bounty all around us. **Amen.**

A prayer of blessing

May the God of all life and power

breathe into your heart, mind and soul.

And may the love of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit Be with you and all those you love now and evermore. **Amen**

Christopher