**ZOOM EUCHARIST**

**SUNDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2020 - CHRIST THE KING**

*May I speak…*

*‘*I pray that you may know the riches of his glorious inheritance ….’

‘He will separate people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats…’

Some years ago, visiting Israel, I saw a scene exactly like this passage - a shepherd, in the countryside near the Negev desert, leading a large herd of sheep, and goats, all mixed together as one flock.

But in the evening, the shepherd has to separate them. Goats need warmth and shelter in the chilly nights of Israel. Sheep are hardier. As we know, shepherds in Jesus’s time would abide in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

During the day, it is difficult to keep them apart. And the shepherd - or governor, for in Hebrew and Greek the same word covers the person who leads the people - gets to know them all.

Jesus is telling his disciples - and the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem - about God’s kingdom. He is just about to die himself. But that death will lead to his resurrection - and, at the end of time, to God’s kingdom: Christ entering into glory, as King of all things.

Are we **ready** for that marvellous kingdom of absolute goodness? Not ‘are we worthy?’ - none of us are that. But we are called to live expectantly, preparing to meet God whenever his kingdom comes. We cannot predict when that is.

Jesus has just told the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. The foolish ones didn’t have enough oil in their lamps and missed the wedding feast because they had to go and buy more. Last week, we heard the parable of the talents, and the man who buried his talent in the ground - where it couldn’t be used.

In today’s reading, Christ the king - powerless in the world’s eyes as he hung broken on the cross, but now seen in his full wonder and glory - assesses and sifts his flock. Dividing the sheep and the goats.

On the right Christ puts those who have cared for him: on the left, those who ignored him in his need.

Both groups ask the same question. ‘**When** did we see you?’ Neither group understands how he can make this judgement. But do you sense hear a different tone in their questions? The first group are genuinely bewildered. They have simply done what they felt was right - not tried to notch up Brownie points on Jesus’s scoreboard.

The second group are defensive. If we had ***known*** that was you, you can almost hear them think, of ***course*** we would have helped! But we didn’t think those poor, hungry, sick people were important enough for ***us*** to stop and help!

But everyone is equally valuable to Jesus Christ - and everyone’s need matters. What we do for the most deprived and powerless of his brothers and sisters, we do for him. In not helping them, we ignore him too.

Here’s another true story. The issue was much less trivial than feeding the hungry, but it shows how easily we can be influenced by superficial prejudice.

Some years ago Roger and I, with two others - not from Hadstock - were doing the annual walk to raise money for historic churches. It was muddy. We were in our walking clothes: not our smartest attire. I had no clerical collar on.

Approaching one church on our route, we saw others heading in the same direction. Smartly dressed. Large hats; suits; bright coloured dresses. There was going to be a wedding! How lovely!

We reached the porch, hoping for someone to sign our forms to show that we had visited that church. But instead of the welcoming smiles we’d found at other churches, we were met with almost a snarl from the vicar. You could almost hear her thinking - How ***dare*** this group with their muddy boots come just at this time and lower the tone! I certainly won’t let them in!

We didn’t want to complicate the arrangements either, so we turned and went on our way. But I found myself wondering: **if I had been wearing my clerical collar**, would she have reacted like that…?

I suspect it would have been very different. She would have smiled, tactfully apologising that we couldn’t look round the church just now because the wedding was about to start, and wishing us well on our walk.

And that realisation made me feel very cross, for all those with me. Because it suggested she might unconsciously treat people differently, depending on how important she thought they were.

Is that our temptation too?

Jesus’s message here, as in the Good Samaritan, is: it’s not saying the right words that matters, but actively caring for others, whoever they are - not trying to judge whether they deserve it.

Do we always get that right? We may **mean** to… but ….

But St Paul encourages his little church in Ephesus - and us too - praying that God may give us that spirit of wisdom as we come to know him, and to know the hope to which we are called: that Christ may enlighten our hearts and lead us ever deeper into his truth.

In this extraordinary year, with its extraordinary challenges, one heartening spark has been the outflowing of community. So many have reached out to care for neighbours. Got to know each other better. Picked up shopping. Delivered prescriptions. Phoned the person across the road who is on their own. And so on. They sound like little things. But we have learnt this year how much they matter.

May we hold to those habits of care as we go into Christ’s future, trusting that whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do also for him. Amen.