

**Sunday Collects, Readings and Reflection for Christ the King
22nd November 2020**

*You can use this sheet in conjunction with our recorded service
which you can find here <https://youtu.be/DQ0UgdYvAPo>,
on the Christ Church Shamley Green YouTube channel
or via the link provided on our website www.shamleygreen.net.*

COLLECT

God the Father, help us to hear the call of Christ the King
and to follow in his service,
whose kingdom has no end;
for he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, one glory. Amen.



FIRST READING

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.
As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep,
so I will seek out my sheep.
I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered
on a day of clouds and thick darkness.
I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries,
and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them with good pasture.
I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured,
and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.
Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them:
I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.
Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns
until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged;
and I will judge between sheep and sheep.
I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David,
and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.
And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them;
I, the LORD, have spoken.

GOSPEL

Matthew 25:31-end

Jesus said to his disciples: 31 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory,
and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.
32 All the nations will be gathered before him,
and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,
33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.
34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;
35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing,
I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."
37 Then the righteous will answer him,
Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food,
or thirsty and gave you something to drink?
38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you,
or naked and gave you clothing?
39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?"
40 And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you,
just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

41 Then he will say to those at his left hand,
“You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;
42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,
43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing,
sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”
44 Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty
or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?”
45 Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you,
just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”
46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

REFLECTION *The Reverend James Cooke*

There was an item in the news about 2 months ago that may have slipped past your radar. The Caribbean island of Barbados announced it was planning to remove the Queen as its head of state and become a republic by November of next year. The protests against the killing of black people by the police in the United States have triggered a debate in the Caribbean about the legacy of empire. Jamaica is another island thinking of taking the same action.

It all shows just how different the idea of the monarchy is today compared to how it was at the time of Jesus. In those days Kings were all-powerful and, whilst they wouldn't want to upset their subjects so much that a rebellion ensued, basically what they said went.

Today is Christ the King Sunday when we remember that Jesus is sovereign over the world that God has made. And the parable I read earlier included these words: ***Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;***

But Jesus was a different kind of king – different from other kings of that time and different from all modern monarchies. He went about helping others. He ***came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.*** And those who live under his kingship naturally aim to live according to his values. They want to help others.

So far, so good. But, that doesn't make it an easy parable for us to read. Chapters 24 and 25 in Matthew's gospel are all about the return of Jesus at the end of the age and the judgment that will follow. The division of people into 2 groups (the sheep and the goats). I'm sure you noticed the strong similarities with our OT reading from Ezekiel: ***I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep*** says the Lord. The fat sheep seem to correspond to the goats in Matthew.

It's a difficult parable because the references to judgment can sound worrying. Tom Wright has written these helpful words about justice and judgment:

There are caricatures of God and his judgment which we should certainly avoid like the plague. God is not a sadistic monster who would happily consign most of his beloved creatures to eternal fire. But, there are equal and opposite caricatures that we should also beware of. God is not an indulgent grandparent determined to spoil his children by letting them do whatever they like and still giving them sweets at the end of the day.

I only have to mention names like George Floyd or Peter Sutcliffe for us to realise that there can be no such thing as justice without judgment.

In Jesus' day sheep and goats were frequently herded together. But sheep are docile, gentle creatures, whereas goats are unruly and uncooperative and can easily upset the sheep. Because they don't feed or rest well together, the shepherd would often separate them for grazing and for sleeping at night.

And Jesus, the king also separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep are really surprised when he thanks them for caring for him when he was in need, because they can't remember ever having helped him. That's why he reassures them, ***Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.*** (v 40)

For the goats it's the exact opposite and they are surprised that the king speaks to them harshly. They hadn't noticed those who needed help, or perhaps, they didn't consider them important enough to help. They were not condemned for doing bad things. They were condemned for failing to do good things.

And this story about the importance of responding positively to the needs of others reminds me of a letter that the archbishops sent to the clergy on Nov 1st as we were about to enter Lockdown part 2.

'This is a difficult and challenging time for all of us. It is our view that the best way we can serve our nation now is by pouring our energy into doing the things that we can do, which is to pray and to serve. We also dare to hope that we will be kind to each other and that God will give us the courage and humility we need to be faithful witnesses to the gospel of peace.'

Just think what a big difference it would make if Christians up and down our land were to follow that advice – to pray to God to bring us safely through this dark time, and to take seriously our calling to serve the needs of those in our neighbourhoods who are in need.

But can we really make much difference? As a mathematician I can't help being fond of equations. And there's an equation I came across recently that goes like this: Small actions x lots of people = a big change.

It reminds me of the story of the starfish:

One day, an old man was walking along a beach that was littered with 1000s of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide. As he walked he saw a young boy who was eagerly throwing the starfish back into the sea, one by one.

Puzzled, the man looked at the boy and asked what he was doing. Without looking up, the boy replied, "I'm saving these starfish, Sir".

The old man chuckled aloud, "But, there are thousands of starfish and only one of you. What difference can you make?"

The boy picked up a starfish, threw it into the water and turned to the man: "It made a difference to that one!"

I wonder, have you ever asked yourself how you might be able to serve others? Have you ever prayed for God to guide you as you think how best you can honour him by reaching out to those in need?

Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Amen.

FINAL PRAYER

Destitute king,
one with the hungry, the naked and the scorned:
may our faith be proved not in dogma and piety
but in serving you in the last and the least;
through Jesus Christ, the stranger's Lord. Amen.
(Steven Shakespeare 'Prayers for an Inclusive Church')

BLESSING

Christ our King make you faithful and strong to do his will
that you may reign with him in glory;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you this day and remain with you always. Amen.



Chancel window 'Hope and Love' – Peter Scott