



Sunday Reflection Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time



in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone

For Sunday 26 November 2023

Christ the King

**This week the preacher is the Rector at
both churches.**

This is the last Sunday of the Church's year. Today we rejoice in Christ the King, ruler and judge of all, who sits on the throne of glory. We long to inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world, and gather now to worship God.

“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’” Matthew 25:34

Illustration to set the scene for our thinking

Early on in today's Gospel reading we hear that the Son of Man ***“will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats”***.

The Bible does rather seem to have it in for goats.

Whenever sheep and goats appear together, the sheep are the goodies and the goats are the baddies.

Indeed, on the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), a goat is selected to have the sins of the people placed upon it and is banished into exile in the desert – the origin of the term “**scapegoat**”.

This aversion to goats may seem puzzling.

But perhaps the explanation may be found in their behaviour.

A lot of my childhood years were spent at my maternal grandparents small holding in North Wales in Clwyd where all sorts of animals abounded – including sheep and goats.

Anyone who has worked with sheep and goats will tell you that while sheep can be feisty, goats are in a league of their own for inquisitiveness and wilfulness.

Sheep will permit themselves to be herded, to be gathered in sheepfolds for protection against predators and the elements, and will generally play follow-my-leader in most situations.

Sheep farmers sometimes speak of the “**collective intelligence**” of sheep.

Goats, however, are most definitely individualists, who do their own thing, go their own way, look after their own interests and rarely take any notice of what any nearby human might have in mind for them.

Gospel Teaching we can take from the texts

When sheep behave like goats, as in today’s reading from Ezekiel, if you have a read when you get home today, they incur censure.

And Matthew's Gospel makes it clear that sheep and goats, in this allegory, are defined by their behaviour rather than whether they are, for example, Jews or Gentiles.

The sheep are those who served Christ in **“the least of these” – the stranger, the person who is hungry, thirsty or naked.**

The goats are those who did not.

And just as when the scapegoat is sent out into the desert during the festival of Yom Kippur, these “goats” will be banished from the presence of God.

The sheep and goats in this passage are categorised simply by their behaviour.

It was not that the **“goats”** actively sinned, but their sin lay in their failure to serve those in need, and thereby they failed to serve Christ. Those whom the Son of Man blesses in this Gospel reading are blessed not for their faith, nor for acknowledging Christ the King, nor for diligence in prayer.

Their blessedness lies in their behaviour, and specifically in **the way they treat the weakest and most marginalised in society.**

Christ the King, sitting in judgement as befits a king, sitting upon the throne of his glory, judges his people according to their actions towards the humblest and lowest in his kingdom.

Application of the teaching to our lives and praying

Like some of you my soul was nurtured by the worship in the Book of Common Prayer, penitents confess to having **“erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep”.**

Furthermore, **“we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done”**.

This is known as the sin of omission – **not only actively doing what is wrong, but failing to do what is right**.

In the passage from Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus makes it clear that failure to do what is right is also a sin.

When it comes to caring for those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick, or a prisoner, **“just as you did not do it to one of the least of these... you did not do it to me”**.

The challenge to us, as modern disciples, is to look with fresh eyes at the opportunities which everyday life affords us.

As we considered the Bricks without Straw initiative of Bishop Kevin we also thought about the Anglican **“The Five Marks of Mission”** which were developed in order to express the Anglican Communion’s commitment to God’s holistic and integral mission.

One of them is **“to respond to human need through loving service”**.

This imperative grows out of our faith in God and as a result of our experience of God’s love.

But not only is this loving service something which we must do – and must not fail to do – for our fellow human beings. It is also, as today’s Gospel reading shows, an indicator of how we are responding to Christ in our relationship with him.

Because, as he says, “**just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me**”.

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