

Sunday 22nd November 2020

Welcome to Worship at Home

Reading Psalm 95:1-17a

¹ *O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our
salvation!*

² *Let us come into his presence with
thanksgiving;*

*let us make a joyful noise to him with songs
of praise!*

³ *For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.*

⁴ *In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.*

⁵ *The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have
formed.*

⁶ *O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!*

⁷ *For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.*

Prayer of approach and confession

All loving God, as we worship you,
may we know you near.

Our hearts are full of adoration and praise as
we look to you Our faithful God.

Holy and forgiving God, we are sorry for all that
is wrong and not of You in our life.

We have sinned against You and each other
in thought and word and deed.

As we turn towards you Lord, may we know
your forgiveness and hear the gracious word
of Christ Jesus who said,

Your sins are forgiven.

Amen, thanks be to God.

StF N°185

¹ Sing we the King who is coming to reign;
glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain!
Life and salvation his empire shall bring,
joy to the nations when Jesus is King:

chorus

*Come let us sing; praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King!
this is our story, who to Jesus belong:
glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

² All shall be well in his kingdom of peace;
freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase;
justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring;
wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King:

chorus

³ Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin;
doubt shall not darken his witness within;
hell has no terrors, and death has no sting;
love is victorious when Jesus is King:

chorus

⁴ Kingdom of Christ, for your coming we pray;
hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
when this new song your creation shall sing;
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King:

chorus

Charles Silvester Home (1865-1914)

Reading Matthew 25:31-46

**‘Lord, when was it that
we saw you...’**

Reflection

The imagery within this parable is of the sheep and the goats. It is more common to see a flock of sheep in the dales than a mixed flock of sheep and goats in the field. However, for first century hearers of Jesus' words, they would have been more than familiar with this image of a shepherd separating the sheep and the goats.

Of course, this is not anything to do with sheep and goats, but rather about people finding themselves in the world together and drawing distinction on how we respond to Christ through how we meet others. Further, the image shows how both are together and how both will be judged.

I find this parable fascinating in the way it highlights the responses given to the judgement. 'Lord, when was it that we saw you...hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or in prison?' Both question when it was that they responded or failed to respond. Of course, the answer is the same too, 'just as you did it to one of the least of these' or did not in the case of the goats.

I wonder, have you ever considered how by serving another is as if you did it for God. Not only is amazing to be able to serve God in such ways, but it also reminds us of how valued and loved those described in the parable as one of the least actually are. Value is found in earthly things, but in a heavenly heart. Valued by and found in God.

In Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 2 it reads 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.' Recall to how Cleopas and fellow disciple on their walk to Emmaus met and entertained Jesus after they urged Jesus to stay with them, not knowing of until their eyes were opened at the breaking of bread. These two examples remind us of how welcoming the stranger can lead to divine encounters, just imagine that.

So, lets get back to the parable of the sheep and the goats. Both seemingly unknowingly have either responded or failed to respond to the those in need.

If I were sharing this parable within a school context, I would have to nuance the reading with the 'stranger danger' and whilst it is possible to see things through different lenses such as recognising the complications. It is equally possible to see the immense number of those in need.

Over recent months the news headlines included reports of the Manchester United and England footballer Marcus Rashford calling for the government to provide free lunches for children, especially so because of the increased deprivation being experienced due to coronavirus.

Another report was of another retired footballer and now tv presenter Gary Lineker welcoming a refugee into his home, providing help and a safety. Perhaps both these acts of compassion and kindness made the news because of the celebrity status of Marcus and Gary. Personally, I welcome more of these news stories and what a difference those free school lunches will make to the children that enjoy them.

These and similar good news stories should be celebrated. I give thanks to God whenever I see such acts because it means that some of those in need are receiving some help. As mentioned before, it is all too easy to see the immense number of those in need. And for such great need it can only be met by an even greater God.

It is to God who we turn, and it is by the grace of God that we receive salvation through Jesus Christ. This parable doesn't negate from this truth and if we look to the greatest commandments in paraphrase to love God with our all and to love our neighbour, then this parable prompts the question, am I loving God with my all and am I loving my neighbour?

In the second chapter of James, we are reminded about what alive faith looks like, 'For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead. I would encourage reading the whole chapter, if not the whole book of James. Furthermore, I would encourage everyone to be like sheep in a sheep and goats' kind of way. To live out the love of God, in a loving, faith alive way. **Amen.**

StF N°325

¹Jesus Christ – Perfect Love,
Holy One that knows no fault,
screen my thoughts, make me clean,
know the motives of my heart.
When I see my selfish choice,
when I glimpse your holiness,
than I realise again,
Perfect Love has come to cleanse.

²Jesus Christ – Lord of all,
plant in me the kingdom seed.
Search me, Lord, when I'm found
looking only to my needs.
When I see the way to you lived,
how you dignified the poor,
then I realise again
how I need to know you more.

³Jesus Christ – Lamb of God,
Love resolved to take our place.
Who can write or describe
all of your self-giving grace?
When I look at the brutal cross,
innocence and beauty slain,
that's when I realise once more
you fully understand our pain.

⁴Jesus Christ – King of heaven,
qualified to wear the crown.
In your face, radiant grace
draws us closer to your throne.
When we see your generous heart,
when we touch the world you love,
that's when we realise again;
Perfect Love is Perfect Hope.

Prayer for others (using the introductions,
please include your own prayers)

We pray for the hungry, remembering those
in hard circumstances, struggling for food

*God of the least, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer*

We pray for the thirsty, remembering those
who do not have access to clean safe water.

*God of the least, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer*

We pray for the stranger, remembering the
homeless and refugees.

*God of the least, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer*

We pray for the naked, remembering those
who are vulnerable and exploited.

*God of the least, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer*

We pray for the sick, remembering those in
hospital and living with illness.

*God of the least, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer*

We pray for those in prison, remembering
those living with consequences in need of
restoration.

*God of the least, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer*

Loving God with every opportunity may we
serve, meet and welcome all in your love.
God of the least accept these prayers in the
precious name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

StF N°713 –

¹Show me how to stand for justice:
how to work for what is right.
how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead.

²Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received –
for my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed:
let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son.

³Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence
every day in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with you.

Martin Leckebusch (b. 1962)

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Questions for further prayerful reflection.

You may want to spend time considering the questions below either privately or together with others.

Q1. What is your disposition towards others in need and is this affected by what the need might be? For example, is your disposition different towards the hungry than towards those in prison?

Q2. Thinking further about your nature with your disposition towards others, what influences do you recognise. For example, how you were raised; experiences; society, etc?

Q3. What ways do you feel led by God to act in response to needs you see in the world? This could be locally and globally.

Q4. Recognising the grace of God, when have you been in need and received an act of loving kindness? Did that experience change you in any way?

A Blessing

The Lord give strength to his people.
The Lord bless his people with peace.
May we go into the world
to walk in God's light,
to rejoice in God's love
and to reflect God's glory. **Amen.**