

Reflection: Sunday 22nd November 2020

Matthew 25. 31 - end

Jesus tells about the Final Judgement

Our Gospel this morning describes the separation of the Sheep and the Goats and is one of the best-known parables. It is the third and final parable in Matthew Chapter 25, that Jesus tells, which emphasises the fact that He will return, and people will be asked how they have responded to the Gospel message. It focuses on people who are caught completely unaware of what was required of them and learn after it is too late.

Telling a good story is something that Jesus was exceptionally gifted at doing. He used familiar things that people were used to seeing and this story illustrates a



regular occurrence that everyone listening would have experienced for themselves, that of a shepherd separating the goats from the sheep at the end of the day. Stories are enormously powerful. Jesus could have just said, "Help one another when in need. If you don't you can't be part of the Kingdom." A story though draws us in, helping you and I to relate to what is going on. The story impacts upon us emotionally and our feelings help us to learn and apply what we have learnt to our own lives.

It is also important for us to remember that when something becomes familiar, we can stop really listening to the story because we have heard it all before and therefore, we know all there is to know about it. Familiarity can be our downfall and to be aware of this is important. It is good to listen afresh, to be open and receptive to things we have not thought of before.

In this parable Jesus describes the consequences of two different attitudes towards Christ's return. The person who diligently prepares for it by investing his or her time and talents to serve God and their neighbour, without seeking reward, will be rewarded (the sheep in the story). In contrast the person who has no heart for the work of the kingdom and chooses to live life in a selfish way will be punished (the goats in the story). God, (The King), rewards faithfulness. Those who bear no fruit for God's kingdom cannot be expected to be treated the same as those who are faithful.

The real evidence of our belief is the way we act towards each other 'to see the face of Jesus in everyone,' we meet, a phrase often used by Mother Teresa. To treat all we encounter as if they were Jesus is not an easy thing to do. Yet how we respond to each other in words and actions demonstrates what we really think about Jesus' words to us: Feed the hungry, give the homeless a place to stay, look after the sick; acts of mercy we all can do every day. These acts do not depend on wealth, ability, or intelligence; they are simple acts freely given and freely received as such. If we are honest, there is no excuse to neglect those who have deep needs. We cannot just hand over responsibility to the Church or government. Jesus asks us to be involved in showing concern and care for others. As I have said not an easy thing to do but something all of us can be aware of and try to respond to. God does not expect us to be perfect, we are human after all, but He does want us to be aware and not to walk by when someone needs help. He asks us to always be open to responding whenever we can in a positive way so that our faith becomes so much a part of us that it reflects God's love for all.

Rev'd Abbey