

Sunday 22nd November 2020

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come to hear the Word. Come to do the Word.
Come to experience Comfort. Come to experience
Challenge.
Come to find Church. Come to find God.

HYMN STF 67

This, this is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend;
Whose love is as great as his power,
And neither knows measure nor end.

'Tis Jesus, the First and the Last,
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We'll praise him for all that is past,
And trust him for all that's to come.

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Dear Loving Father, Amazing Creator,
we are overwhelmed by the beauty of the world
that you have made.

Beauty that you share with us.

Yet there is so much more than that, for we are
lost for words

when we remember your love for us. Your love
shown in Jesus.

Your love that forgives what we often can't.

May we and all those who need that forgiveness
receive it deep in our hearts.

Holy Spirit, fill us with the warming mercy and
grace of Jesus our Saviour this very day. Amen

INTRODUCTION TO THE READING

In Matthew chapter 25, Jesus gave three stories
about how to live NOW as we await his coming
again. There is the parable of the 10 bridesmaids, 5
who have sufficient oil for their lamps and 5 who
run out of oil. One of the lessons there being the
old Scout Motto 'Be Prepared'! Then there is the
parable of the talents where two out of the three
men speculate to accumulate and are praised and
one does not - and is not praised. One of the
lessons possibly being as simple as use what God has
given you before it's too late! And the third story,

that is the one we will have today - what's that one
going to be about? Well I am wondering whether it
has got something to do with our motivation and
how we actually show our faith in practice???? See
what you think?

Listen for the Lord... Matthew 25.31 -46

The Sheep and the Goats

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory,
and all the angels with him, he will sit on his
glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be
gathered before him, and he will separate the
people one from another as a shepherd
separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will
put the sheep on his right and the goats on his
left.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right,
'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take
your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for
you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was
hungry and you gave me something to eat, I
was thirsty and you gave me something to
drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,
³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was
sick and you looked after me, I was in prison
and you came to visit me.'

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord,
when did we see you hungry and feed you, or
thirsty and give you something to drink?

³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite
you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go
to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I

tell you, whatever you did for one of the least
of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did
for me.' ⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his
left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into
the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his
angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me

nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me
nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you
did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you
did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and
you did not look after me.'

⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' ⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

REFLECTION So what's Jesus got against goats? If you have watched any farming or countryside programmes recently then I am sure you will have fallen in love with a goat or two, whether it be pygmy, long-eared or short-haired. They are just so cute! So what is Jesus doing? Well, I believe that once again he is using imagery - picture language that the people of the time would understand and that we have to rediscover for our own era. Israel was a land whose people relied on sheep and goats for meat and dairy, as well as the skins being used for clothing and tents. Common animals, whose common characteristics and tendencies were generally known. So how did these sheep and goats differ? Well, one difference was in the way they fed. Sheep graze, slowly eating the short vegetation that is close to the ground. Goats on the other hand browse, looking out for foliage all over the place, shrubs, trees, washing lines. As followers of Jesus we have been given all we need to feed on, his word. I know, the grass, leaves and trees that the goats go browsing after on the other side may often look greener - but experience tells us that they are not. So what are you and I

feeding on? What has nourished us through this strange time? Where have you and I found the strength, the energy, the spiritual nutrients to keep going? You may have noticed that in this world of videoed services that we have been inhabiting recently, many folks are positioned in front of overflowing bookcases. Great. But it starts here, (bible) surely - this is the best food for sheep. For those who want to follow, who want to stick close to the shepherd.

Goats, on the other hand, they will eat everything because they have a high level of curiosity and independence. A goat will often challenge being fenced in and will climb and jump to escape. Now curiosity is not a bad thing that is how we learn, but this desire to be independent from the rest? I think this is where Jesus really started to get firm in this story - because without actually using the word community Jesus majored on it. 'When did you help?' asks Jesus. 'When did you do something for somebody else?' You can't answer that in a positive way if you have decided to be independent.

Sheep for all their weaknesses do have a tendency to keep together as a community and they do listen out for the shepherd's voice. Here in the Forest of Dean sheep are often seen wandering all over the roads and you wonder who they belong to, but when the battered old white van comes along... they certainly know who they belong to. They know the shepherd and

they radiate towards him. They are a community. Jesus, in this story, gives the sheep and the goats a checklist of human needs present in the community - it could be today - people in need of food and water, clothing, company, compassion. And the difference in the story is that the sheep fulfil these needs while the goats do not. Jesus notices this and praises the sheep for all they have done. He makes it personal and thanks them for doing these things for him, they are naturally confused about it... when did we do that for you Lord, don't remember that? Every time you did it for someone else, that's when - he answers. That time when you put a couple more items in your shopping trolley and placed them in the container by the supermarket window, that time when you wrote to your MP about school meals, that's when. And the goats they are naturally confused too. They are sure they have done everything they can for the Lord, their worship and prayer are spot on. 'When was it that we didn't help you - Lord when did we miss seeing you?' 'The time you didn't do it for the person down the road - that's when' - he answers.

If, to use the imagery of the story, we are to be classed as the blessed sheep and not the cursed goats, then surely we too must strive to treat everyone we meet as if we were serving Christ himself. We must recognise the needs of others in our community and work to fulfil those needs. During the time of Covid-19, church families have been amazing at looking after

each other. However, whilst the usual community activities remain cancelled we have to make sure that we continue to reach out to those around us as well. And like the sheep we must do it until it becomes so natural that we don't realise we are doing it.

I said prior to the reading that maybe much of this was about motivation. At times our motivation needs a bit of a kickstart. We often say that when someone preaches a sermon that they should be preaching to themselves at the same time, and I have to say that when I was preparing this service, the reading would not let me go, and that night I said Lord, would you put someone in my path tomorrow that I can help more than I would regularly do. That very next day I had a telephone call completely out of the blue where I was able to do just that. Was I more motivated, was I more open to the Holy Spirit??? Whatever it was I know that I am going to pray that prayer again, maybe you'll give it a go too. Christ is looking for service motivated by compassion rather than service done for show. He wants us to give to those who can do nothing for us in return. (Oh yes, that Final Judgement day, this is the only test Jesus says we will have!) In Jesus we have the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for us. As his sheep he has given us the most amazing example to follow. The question is - Will we?

Hymn - STF 672

1. **Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?**

**We want to serve you, to answer your call.
Where do you lead us and ask us to follow?
What should we do in our service to all?**

2. **'Go to the hungry, to those who have nothing;
go where the farmlands are empty and bare.
I broke the bread for the people around me;
out of my plenty, think what you can share.**

3. **'Go to the homeless, to those who have nowhere;
go where my people sleep out in the rain.
I had no comfort but what others gave me;
offer them shelter, give ease to their pain.**

4. **'Go to the outcast, to those who have no-one;
go where my sheep are rejected and lost.
I dined with sinners and reached out to lepers;
go and do likewise, and don't count the cost.**

5. **Where will we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?
We are your servants who answer your call.
You go before us, and there we will follow,
taking our cross in the service of all.**

Prayers of intercession

Lord, as we bring these prayers we ask for wisdom that we might be the answer to many of them, by our giving, our living and our loving.

We humbly say Lord, Touch a life through me

When I was hungry and thirsty you supplied my needs
Heavenly Father, we pray for those who through famine, drought, warfare or natural disaster lack food and water. May they receive the necessities that we have daily.

We humbly say Lord, Touch a life through me

When I was homeless you gave me shelter.
Father God, we pray for those who have no place to call home, both in this country and abroad.

May we love and never judge. May they find a place of welcome and respect.

We humbly say Lord, Touch a life through me

When I was ill, you brought healing
God with us, we pray for those who are ill, those whose treatment will bring full recovery, those for whom it is less certain. May they receive healing and wholeness

We humbly say Lord, Touch a life through me

When I was imprisoned you brought release
Father of all, we pray for those who are imprisoned - trapped behind physical bars or chained by guilt or loneliness. May they find release

We humbly say Lord, Touch a life through Me. Amen

Lord's Prayer

Hymn HP 473

Heavenly Father, may your blessing
Rest upon your children now,
When in praise your name we hallow,
When in prayer to you we bow;
In the wondrous story reading
Of the Lord of truth and grace,
May we see your love reflected
In the light of his dear face.

May we learn from this great story
All the arts of friendliness;
Truthful speech and honest action,
Courage, patience, steadfastness;
How to master self and temper,
How to make our conduct fair;
When to speak and when be silent,
When to do and when forbear.

May your Spirit wise and holy
With his gifts our spirits bless,
Make us loving, joyous, peaceful,
Rich in goodness, gentleness,
Strong in self-control, and faithful,
Kind in thought and deed; for he
Teaches, 'What you do for others
You are doing unto me.'

Lord Jesus Christ, send us out with confidence in your word, may our thoughts, words and deeds bring glory to your name. **Amen.**

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