

Christ the King – Bromsgrove online

Matthew 25.31-46

Sermon

As many of you will know, today is the last Sunday in the Church's year – so we could call today New Year's Eve! Next week is Advent Sunday, which marks the beginning of a new liturgical year. For those interested in detail, we start Year B in the three-year lectionary cycle next Sunday. For many clergy, today is the last day in our diaries which run from Advent to Advent.

To help mark the end of the liturgical year, today has, in recent years, become known as the feast of Christ the King. It is a kind of 'reminder' festival in the sense that just as we prepare to begin telling the story of Jesus all over again, we remind ourselves that Jesus is our King, that in the end, when push comes to shove, well for us there is no other source of power and authority. Jesus is King.

Today is known by another name too. And the clue is in our post communion prayer which is based on the traditional Collect prayer for today from the BCP.

Today is **Stir up Sunday**; the traditional day for making Christmas Puddings...something I used to do, but haven't managed now for several years.

We all have our traditions at this time of year and although this Christmas will be different to normal, I hope we can connect with as many of those traditions as possible.

However, Christmas turns out, we have our faith, and especially the teachings of Jesus that have endured through many a crisis.

I wonder which for you is the most important of Jesus' teachings?

'Love your neighbour as yourself' perhaps?

This morning's gospel reading offers us one teaching that might be in the running...

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.

This teaching encourages us to see the Christ in everyone.

Now this isn't easy. Especially for those of us who continue to carry the scars of many deeply hurtful wounds.

Yet even for most of us who are exposed to little more than human frailty and selfishness it can be challenging to see Christ in others.

The challenge Jesus is laying out for us here is more than a call to be generous. Yes, clearly Jesus is saying give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, welcome to the stranger, clothes to the naked, care to the sick or visits to the prisoner.

Yet Jesus is imploring us to do more than such good works, vital though they are. Rather, Jesus is calling us more deeply into a relationship with those in need that reaches beyond the practical to the much more life enriching, life affirming, life enhancing. And it is through our relationship with the hungry and thirsty, stranger and naked, sick and prisoner that Jesus draws us into relationship with Him.

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.

My track record on this is not a good one. I have often dropped coins into a hat without asking the recipient's name. Often, I've done it without even catching their eye; is that because I fear they are a human being like me? I am reminded of the TV series 'Rev' that included the character 'Colin', a down and out who befriended the vicar and who acted as a constant reminder of the desperately sad other side of life; and ultimately exposed the vicar's struggles to forgive 70 times 7. Part of me thinks Colin was cast deliberately as a 'Christ' figure.

Entering into a relationship with people in need – as opposed to salving one's conscience with an easy donation – is not easy and it's costly. For one runs the risk of being changed too; relationships are always reciprocal; donations never need be.

If entering into a relationship with those in need may turn out to be costly; so, suggests Jesus is the alternative.

Jesus' analogy of the sheep and the goats is not easy listening. Judgement is not a popular idea these days especially when accompanied with punishment, and it certainly doesn't make me sit comfortably.

I wonder if like me you've already started to think about your new year's resolutions.

The great thing about New Year's Eve are new year's resolutions – the secular equivalent perhaps to absolution. However selfishly we have behaved up until this moment, today can be different if we turn our ways around and change our patterns of behaviour from now on.

So, as we get ready to start a new church year next week and begin the great Advent countdown to Jesus' birth, let's take some time this week to think about the hungry, naked, thirsty and stranger Christ. Which of these might lead us to a deeper knowledge of Jesus in the new year ahead?

Amen.