

Parable of The Sheep and the Goats Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 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. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“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. 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, 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.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“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.’

“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. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 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.’

“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?’

“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.’ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Sermon by Rev Peter

Mothering Sunday is a tradition that goes back to the 16th century. It's had times of weaker and stronger observance over the years, but recently through the modern approach to Mothers Day it has been in resurgence. How strange it is that this year we can't gather together with families and church family in the normal way. Mothers Day this year relies on the bonds of love that we share in our hearts and memories even more than ever.

This Christian festival has its roots in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, where we read of Jerusalem, being comforted by God as a mother comforts her child. For this is what the Lord says:

“I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees.¹³ As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.”

How we need that comfort today. May we be strengthened by that ancient promise of God, that God will extend peace to his people like a river, that he will richly provide for our needs and that we will be carried, and more than carried dandled on God's knees – comforted like a dearly loved child is comforted and loved by its mother.

Please take some time to enjoy and savour that reality today. In the midst of our current storms we all need to remember that God comforts us and loves us.

In the New Testament, the comfort of God seems to be largely associated with the work of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter. Saint Paul describes it in this way in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God”

First, we receive comfort ourselves, says Paul, and then we are equipped to take that comfort to others.

At St John's our sermon series through Lent has focussed on the parables of Jesus. The allocated parable for this Sunday is in Matthew 25:31-46. In this parable Jesus talks about a day when the Son of Man will come in his glory and be seated on his throne. On that day he will gather the nations to himself and separate the sheep and the goats. To the sheep he will say

‘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.’

It strikes me that we need to heed this parable today. We need plenty of sheep to help the world get through this Coronavirus crisis. Let's pray today that we might all know how to offer the small practical acts of kindness that Jesus' followers are called to. Phone a friend, help a neighbour, reach out to others as best we can.

If we are isolated let's keep on praying. And through our isolation and separation the Comforter will draw near. God will dandle us on his knees, refresh us with his love and enable us to get through our challenges.

The archbishop has designated today a National day of prayer. If you are able, at 7 pm tonight take some time to pray the Lord's prayer at home. I will be praying with a lighted candle outside church. And if you can try and keep this as a pattern every day at 7pm – holding our community before God and asking for his healing and comfort.

Closing Prayer of blessing

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,

keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God

and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the + blessing of God almighty,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always.

Amen.