

Sermon Sunday 22nd November 2020

Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24. Matt.25: 31-end and Luke 19: 29-38lock

In the Church of England's calendar, today is described as the 22nd Sunday after Trinity or Ordinary Time and the Sunday before Advent. Please don't worry Andrea I won't talk about Advent and its meaning to us now, I look forward to hearing about it next week.

Trinity or ordinary time is a long period enabling us all to study the Bible and to try and understand what Jesus and God mean to us in our lives today and what we have to do in our Christian lives. Last week Jenny talked about the consequences of not believing in God and Jesus and what would happen when Jesus returns. This week's readings carry on that theme; it's almost as if they are a conclusion to Jesus' teachings with a stark reminder what will happen to us if we don't and also a strong reminder of what we have to do as Christians.

Ezekiel in verse 11 writes **'FOR THIS IS WHAT THE SOVEREIGN LORD SAYS: I MYSELF WILL SEARCH FOR MY SHEEP AND LOOK AFTER THEM.'** God promises to take over as the shepherd of His scattered flock; this was not just for the Jewish people it is meant for us, you and me, today. God's promise to look after us is as true today as it was when Ezekiel prophesied or spoke those words. In these troubling pandemic times, in which we find ourselves, now it is so easy to despair, to lose heart. We may feel our political and dare I say it sometimes our Church leaders are failing us and we start to despair or give up. However, we mustn't give up; remember that God is in control and we must all place our trust in God and He will transform the situation and produce good for His Kingdom and for you and me. In Romans 8 verse 28 Paul writes **'AND WE KNOW THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.'** God works for the good of those who love Him; dare I say it, it's very straight forward. If we love the Lord, in return He will love us unconditionally.

However how do we show that love and ensure we are not the ones to be among those caste out when the Final Judgement comes as told by Jesus in verse 31? To see how we show the love, read verses 35 and 36. **I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU FED ME, I WAS THIRSTY AND YOU GAVE ME DRINK, I NEEDED CLOTHES AND YOU CLOTHED ME, I WAS SICK AND YOU CARED FOR ME, I WAS IN PRISON AND YOU VISITED ME.** The righteous people listening said 'when did we do this?' Jesus' reply in verse 40 tells them and us the answer. **THE KING WILL REPLY, 'I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WHATEVER YOU DID FOR ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE BROTHERS OF MINE, YOU DID FOR ME.'** The point of this parable is not the who but the what. It is about the importance of serving others where service is needed, to love everyone, no matter how hard that may be, and serve anyone we are able to or put more simply to love our neighbour.

I can hear the cries – ‘have not I got enough to worry about, how can I do that in the current pandemic and all the problems it has created for me or it’s someone else’s responsibility.’ Well I’m sorry as Christians it is our responsibility to love and serve those worse off than us. I have spoken before about the number of Charity letters I receive and having to ration my giving so some go unanswered. A small amount can make a difference to a poor needy person; a donation of food to the foodbank, no matter how small or basic will help someone in their time of need; a simple request to your neighbour asking what they may need and a simple hello and smile to all we meet or pass. These and so many other simple acts are what we must do as Christians if we are to honour God and His Son Jesus. Why, because such love for others glorifies God and when we do these simple acts, I believe we are reflecting our love for Him by *loving our neighbour*.

The work of the Community Project is a graphic example of showing love when it fed 500 families a week during the first lockdown and is now feeding 100 a week; perhaps you could help by donating food or supporting the Christmas appeal so that no child will be without a present or food this Christmas? See the Project website for details.

I do not have to tell you of the consequences of not showing love; look at verses 41, 42 AND 43 - **READ**. Very clear, I know where I want to be, therefore I must carry on loving everyone, no matter how difficult and show that love in my life and using what I have and importantly seeking God’s guidance through daily prayer in these difficult times.

So, as we approach Advent and the joy of Jesus’ birth and its meaning, I would like to finish with some beautiful words from the Celtic Prayer Book used at the beginning of Celtic Advent which I discovered this week when I was saying my daily office of worship, study and prayer. **READ PAGE 568. AMEN.**