

For the least of these

Matt 25:31-46

Challenging passage to start a new year - reminder that God will judge all men and women. For most if not all of us, we have trusted Christ so we have that assurance that when we stand before God, we have that assurance of eternal life.

People don't like the idea of God being their judge. The idea of God as a judge doesn't seem to match with the idea of a loving Father. But of course we know that God is a God of love because He doesn't desire that anyone should perish but that all should come to repentance. Our celebration of Communion this afternoon is testimony to a God who loved us so much that He sent His own Son to die for us. It's a celebration of love. And the offer of life and hope is available to each man and woman.

The picture Jesus gives us of the day He will judge the human race and for both those who receive life and those that will be sent to hell, the criteria He will use will be how they responded to Him personally.

I'll start with those who are on the left: *"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?'*

Everyone has the opportunity to respond to Jesus. You can almost see the incredulity in their response to Jesus' words: *'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?'* Jesus hasn't been here - how could He possibly judge them on the basis of ignoring Him? Because when those that don't know Christ fail to see Jesus in others, they have failed to see Him and respond to Him.

The point is, the body of Jesus is here - His people here on Earth. We need to be reminded of our significance. When we became the people of God, we became part of the body of Christ. As such we stand as a witness to the world, we are Jesus to men and women that don't know Him.

I find that a challenge in itself - because how I behave reflects on Jesus. Do they see Him in me?

But there's more here. Let me read the bit about the righteous: *"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, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

Most of all, if we are the body of Christ, it affects the way we treat one another - because we are all part of Him so when Jesus says *'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'* He means just that,

So often we measure our actions by the quality of relationships our society expects of us. So when we speak harsh words to one another, fall out with one another, criticise one another, gossip about one another, fail to care for one another, neglect one another - we hurt Jesus, we damage His name and it's Jesus we bring into disrepute with a world we should be demonstrating Jesus to in our lives.

May 2012 be a year when we carefully examine our relationships as we remind ourselves that as we are church together, we are in Christ; part of Him. That should be something we reflect on.

The other implication of this is that if I am in Christ as part of His body, then I should be Jesus as it were, to all those I meet. How do I respond to the needs of others?

John Ortberg has produced a video that deals with the whole issue of how believers should be Jesus to others and how when we help them, we are doing also to Jesus. Here's a short video clip.

Video clip

Can I help you? Lord is there anything you want to do with this person, for this person, through me? What a difference that would make if we were to guide our relationships with these questions, whether that be with others in the church, or those we have contact with generally. Mother Theresa quote: *“When you are with them, be very tender with them, because when you are with the least of these, there He is in His distressing disguise.”*

Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
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