

## Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020 – Bulwell United Reformed Church

We are challenged to account for our behaviour, at the very least, in this week's Gospel reading Matthew 25:31-46. While the text refers to 'the nations' gathered before the Son of Man in his glory, it does not require a great leap of imagination to understand that this is about what God requires of us. *A short service for personal communion focusing on confessing Jesus is Lord is included. Please have your bread & wine/juice ready.*

### Call to worship

We have been called into the pastures of God,  
where there is nurture, a place to rest,  
safety, and kindness among all.

Let us draw near, in the goodness of God,  
to be with each other,  
and to praise the shepherd who has gathered us here.

**Amen.**

### A prayer of confession

Dear God, where we have been blind to the needs of others:

**forgive us.**

Where we have been slow to take responsibility for our actions:

**forgive us.**

Where we have not taken judgement seriously:

**forgive us.**

Forgive us, and give us your peace.

In Jesus' name.

**Amen.**

**Our Father .....**

**Song King of kings, majesty (Ingrid DuMosch & the London Fox Singers)**

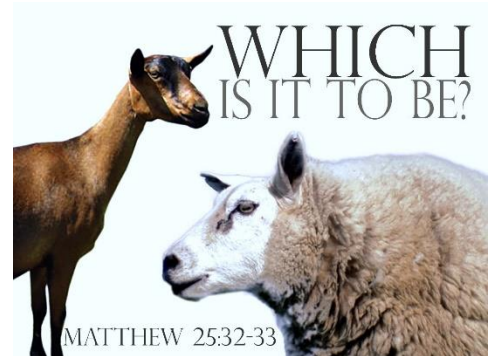
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5VutCGsVXE>

### Matthew 25:31-46 - The sheep and the goats

<sup>31</sup> 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup> '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. <sup>35</sup> 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, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

<sup>37</sup> 'Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?"



<sup>40</sup> '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."

<sup>41</sup> '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. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was ill and in prison and you did not look after me."

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

<sup>45</sup> '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." <sup>46</sup> 'Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.' (NIVUK)

### **The Compassionate King – Matthew 25: 31-46**

In Matthew 25.31-46 we encounter sheep and goats who look surprisingly similar on the outside; yet their deeds will mark one group out from the other. The sheep are those who serve God and others without showiness, while the goats ignore the needy. The parable reminds us that Christ is a different kind of ruler, and his kingdom is one of topsy-turvy values.

This passage is set in the last weeks of Jesus' ministry, after his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. After teaching in the Temple, Jesus leaves and goes to the Mount of Olives. His disciples come to him and he describes to them what will happen when the Messiah comes again and brings God's kingdom. This is another of Matthew's sorting stories; a reminder that our actions have consequences.

In Jesus' day, Jews expected the Messiah to rise from the dead in order to rule as king and judge the people. Who would be judged to have done well and who would be found wanting? People might expect the sheep to be the rich and successful ones. But Jesus appears to be saying that God favours those who help and care for the most vulnerable and weak in society. This is a practical, hands-on gospel. It involves giving food, drink, clothing and hospitality to strangers, caring for the sick and visiting prisoners, not just sitting in a temple or church and praying for them. Matthew paints an amazing picture of a God who is not sitting up in heaven on a throne of glory but is among us and suffering alongside the weak and needy.

Once again, in these parables of Jesus return, the element of surprise is prominent - in the present story everyone gets a shock. What would have been surprising is that the righteous have no idea of the acts of charity they are doing. Their righteousness is visible to God and those who benefit from their generosity of spirit, not to themselves. What of Jesus, the judge's claim that in serving the poor they have encountered him? It is entirely consistent with Jesus' own total identification with the poor and the marginalized.

There is a challenge for us to do the same; remembering that our actions not only have consequences for others, but can separate us from, or bring us closer to, God. Today, many Christians celebrate the feast of Christ the King – the Compassionate King.

Jesus invites us to recognise God in everyday life and reminds us to care for others and respond to injustice. Bishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa once said: 'If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.'

There is a challenge for us to judge our own response to the needs of others and decide if we are sheep or goats. Do we ignore beggars, turn away refugees, condemn criminals? Or do we roll up our sleeves, support Traidcraft & Christian Aid and closer at home, Framework & The Friary, volunteer where we are able and donate to the food bank? The message is clear: be a sheep not a goat! It is within your power to be one or the other. Every moment that you encounter human suffering you are in the presence of the Day of the Lord.

### **Prayers of intercession**

God in whom everything lives and moves and has its being,  
teach us to serve others,  
**as we serve you.**

We pray for the hungry, for those who cannot afford food, and for places where there is no food to buy.

Teach us to serve others,  
**as we serve you.**

We pray for the thirsty, for those who cannot find water,  
for where there is no water that is safe to drink.

Teach us to serve others,  
**as we serve you.**

We pray for strangers, for immigrants and refugees, for the lonely and dispossessed.

Teach us to serve others,  
**as we serve you.**

We pray for those without the basics of our lives, for those who cannot clothe their children,  
for the places where children make the clothes we wear.

Teach us to serve others,  
**as we serve you.**

We pray for the sick and their carers, for those who could be healed if medicine was affordable,  
for the dead and the families and friends who mourn their loss.

Teach us to serve others,  
**as we serve you.**

We pray for prisoners, for those coming to terms with the nature of their crimes,  
For those wrongfully imprisoned and prisoners of conscience.

Teach us to serve others,  
**as we serve you. Amen**

*Please add your prayers for others you wish to pray for today . . .*

**Song The Lord's my shepherd (Stuart Townend)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MGO>

**Prayer of Thanksgiving – Matthew 25: 31-46**

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,  
for your love is forever, faithful from age to age.

In your child, Jesus, the promises have been fulfilled:  
a shepherd king who seeks the lost  
and binds up the wounded.

When he was killed, you raised him from the dead  
and seated him at your side in the heavenly places.  
Now your immeasurable power is at work in us who believe  
to clothe us in compassion and righteousness  
so that we might be fit for the kingdom  
which you prepared for us from the foundation of the world.



***Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,  
we offer you thanks and praise at all times  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.***

**The Sharing of the Bread and the Wine**

We give thanks to you, O God, that you cause the vine to yield fruit.  
We bless you for Christ, the true vine, whose blood was poured out for us.  
By your Holy Spirit sanctify us and this wine, that the cup which we bless may be to us the  
communion of the blood of Christ, and that through abiding in him we may bear fruit that  
shall last.

Eat this bread. It is the bread of life.

Drink this wine. It is the cup of blessing.

**Prayer after communion**

Loving God, you have fed us generously at this table, as we have remembered Jesus and  
rejoiced that he is with us today. We are ready now to follow him, and to be your people in  
the world. May your Holy Spirit show us the way, make us holy and fill us with love.

**A sending out prayer**

O God of kindness,  
send us out with more time for interruptions,  
and more generosity for kindness,  
so that we might see you  
within these walls and beyond these walls.

**Amen.**



