

Reflections for 22nd November 2020

Sunday before Advent

Stir us up

Following on from the parable of the talents that we heard last week, we come now to the last part of Matthew chapter 25, in which God's judgement is pictured as the separation of people into two groups, like the separation of a flock into sheep and goats (a common practice in the time that Jesus lived) – a separation between those who have put faith into practical action by serving the poor and needy, and those who have not.

The story makes clear that the way we respond (or fail to respond) to the poor and needy will show our true response to God in Jesus Christ, and so we will be found to have judged ourselves, by our own actions.

This week, the prayer to be used after receiving communion is based on the collect for today in the 1662 prayer book, which begins with these words:

Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord,
the wills of thy faithful people ...

And so the Sunday before Advent is sometimes known as 'Stir up Sunday', and is associated with 'stirring up' the Christmas pudding mix, but the true meaning of the prayer is a plea to God to stir up our 'wills' – our hearts and minds – to a deeper and more fruitful life of faith.

So, in the light of the gospel readings for these weeks before Advent, we are encouraged to pray for God to 'stir us up' anew;

- to be ready and prepared for God's coming anew into our lives
- to use to the full the gifts and talents that God has entrusted to us
- and to put our faith into action by helping those around us who are in the greatest need

And that is our true preparation for the celebration of Christmas.

Revd John Waller

Stir up, O Lord
the wills of your faithful people;
that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works,
may by you be plenteously rewarded;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Bible readings: Ezekiel 34. 11-16, 20-24; Ephesians 1. 15-23; Matthew 25. 31-46

Story: 'The Sheep and the Goats' (based on the gospel passage)