

Digital Church Service

For week beginning: 22nd November 2020

(David Arnott)

WELCOME

Welcome to our service.

We are pleased you have joined us.

During our service we will have a time
to prayer for others and ourselves,
worship God in our hearts through song
and hear God's Word for us.

Our reading this morning will be
from the gospel of Matthew chapter 25 beginning at verse 31
- if you want to follow along in your Bible

OUR OPENING PRAYER

Dear Father,
Quieten our minds
Still our hearts
For your living ways are all we seek
Strengthen our lives
Inspire our spirits
In your living waters flow endless grace. **Amen**

Our first song of worships includes these words
age to age He stands,
and time is in his hands,
the beginning and the end . . .

HYMN: How Great is Our God

Sung by: Pete and Shirley Evan-Jones. Songwriters: Chris Tomlin/Ed Cash/Jesse Reeves. How Great is our
God lyrics © Capitol Christian Music Group Music Services Group. Used with permission

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We are reminded that
if we say that we have no sin,
we deceive ourselves
and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins,
God, who is faithful and just
will forgive us our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let us confess our sins.

Recalling the past week – our failures to love . . . (quiet reflection)

Together we seek God's forgiveness by saying . . .

Loving God,
we have sinned against you
in what we have thought,
said and done.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

We are truly sorry
and turn away from what is wrong.

Forgive us for the sake of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Here the good news for all who put their trust in Christ

This is His gracious word:

'Your sins are forgiven.'

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Let us praise God . . .

PRAYERS OF ADORATION

Praise be to you, O God,
the maker of the universe,
by whose wisdom we are created and sustained.

Praise be to you, O God,
the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
by whose love we are redeemed and forgiven.

Praise be to you, O God,
the source of all holiness,
by whose Spirit we are made whole
and brought to perfection.

Praise be to you, O God,
Source of all being,
Eternal Word and Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning,
is now and shall be for ever. Amen

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us say together the prayer Jesus taught his followers:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.**

Amen.

BIBLE READING: Matthew 25 v31-46

The Judgement of the Nations

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

Then the righteous will answer him,

“Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?”

And the king will answer them,

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”

Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

ADDRESS

Jesus The Stranger - Matthew 25 v31-46

In a previous occupation as the Communications Manager for a large financial services company, I had the opportunity to fly 2 or 3 times a year to a number of parts of Europe and some locations in North America. Before take-off I was often surprised seeing the majority of passengers, reading, settling children, or almost anything other than apparently listening and watching the safety announcements from the stewards.

Imagine the difference a glimpse of the future could make – if the passengers now they were going to crash! I wondered how attentive passengers would be to their safety instructions if they had had the slightest hint of what would happen minutes later.

What we believe and expect about the future shapes us and changes our priorities in the present!

I would like us to consider the [Gospel] reading from St Matthew 25 v31–46, a passage images the final judgement.

The nations of the world are all gathered before the glorious Son of Man. In these verses an extensive picture of the final judgement - with the sheep and the goats - is used by Jesus to teach how God will judge humankind.

In this story - where God is pictured as a king – the king commends one group of people for showing great kindness to him,- the recipients show surprise!

There is a corresponding shock for those who are rebuked by the king for not showing this level of kindness.

I understand that Palestinian sheep and goats resemble each other. However, they can be distinguished by the fact that the tails of goats point upwards!

The judgement – the crucial decision - concerns who will enter into the Father’s kingdom and inherit eternal life, and who will not. This is a serious business. Although in life the rightness and wrongness of issues may not seem clear at times, at the ultimate judgement there will be clarity: light and darkness, life and death, for and against.

How does the account illustrate how our true nature be known?

Through the conscious and through the unconscious deeds that we have done in our lifetimes. Hang on a minute! Is Jesus teaching salvation by works? It almost reads that way . . . but it is more about judgement by works. We are judged by what we do rather than what we claim.

Earlier in Matthew 7 v21 we hear Jesus say: **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”**

‘Lord, Lord’ is not enough. It is more likely the case, therefore, that the works of love described here are evidence of the trustful orientation towards God that we call faith.

Faith works itself out in love. In the opening verses of Paul’s first letter to Timothy we read: **But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.**

The striking feature of the righteous is that their works of love are spontaneous and done for their own sake rather than for the expectation of a reward. But they are rewarded they, they open-up the way to life!

By contrast we are told in v44 that the unrighteous are unaware of the needs that are staring them in the face.

How is it, then, that Jesus speaks of the works of love having been done to His very self?

Verse 40 refers to: **'these my brothers'**, (different versions). Some consider this to be a reference to acts of love for the Jewish people. However, the words could equally refer to love shown to Jesus' disciples. Or it could be that Jesus is identifying Himself with all who are hungry, thirsty, sick or in unjustly imprisoned, and sees works of love done towards such people as works done to Himself. This would be the most inclusive interpretation, - excluding none of the other categories, and this inclusive interpretation is my preference - since it offers the greatest challenge to us all.

Spontaneous acts of love, generosity and kindness to those in need . . . reveal what is inside us. It is good to do what is good.

Jesus tells the world that He will return and that all people need to read the safety instructions in preparation for His return.

He also tells us that He is already here . . . and He meets us in the hungry person, the thirsty, the naked, the prisoner and the stranger.

Martin of Tours of 4th Century , on meeting a beggar on a freezing night, cut his own cloak in half and shared it with the poor man. That night Martin had a vivid dream in which Jesus was asked by an angel why He was wearing half a piece of cloak. Jesus' reply was - in effect: 'My servant Martin gave it to me.' This dream had a profound effect on the course of Martin's life.

In the list of those to be cared for in this world Jesus includes **'a stranger'**. Jesus identifies Himself with strangers, as He does with the hungry, naked and so on. Each time we reach out in hospitality to a stranger, it is not just an angel that we might be entertaining unawares, but God Himself.

No doubt Jesus could see the real danger of people spiritualizing their love for God, the idea that 'all we have to do is a few religious things and God will be impressed'. What this passage teaches us with fierce clarity is that our love for God has to be expressed by loving our fellow humans, particularly those who are in need . . . including strangers.

The Message Bible paraphrases Matthew 25 v40 like this

'Then the King will say, "I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me - you did it to me"'

Prayer. God who is found in beauty and brokenness, holy and gracious one, whose heart is torn by the suffering of your children, you long for a world of justice and plenty for all.

Liberate us to share in that freedom offered by your kingdom.

Open our eyes to sense your presence in places of despair and fear, open our ears to hear your call to be salt and light in the world, melt our hearts, convert us to the needs of the other, and move us to be your people, a people of justice and care, for our world, for friend and stranger.

[The Revd Andrew Wood]

HYMN Beauty for Brokenness

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INTERCESSIONS

We pray for the Church throughout the world

– that the Spirit will revive

and refresh the Church in every part; *[quiet reflection]*

We pray for our church we are members of

and for the churches in our communities.

We pray for those who come to our churches,

(you may want to pray for one or two people by name) [quiet reflection]

We pray for those who are in leadership in our churches

the church ministers

– that they may be strengthened and upheld in their ministries. *[quiet reflection]*

We pray for those responsible for organising services in different ways during this lockdown and beyond. *[quiet reflection]*

We pray for those who you know to us
who do not know of God's love
and have not accepted Jesus as Friend Saviour and Lord
– for friends or family,
- for neighbours or colleagues,
that God's Spirit may fill their hearts. *[quiet reflection]*

And finally, in these challenging times we pray
for our local hospital . . . *[quiet reflection]*

for our local schools. . . *[quiet reflection]*

local and central government . . . *[quiet reflection]*

Merciful Father
accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

HYMN: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty

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CLOSING

Thank you for joining us for Digital Church. We hope you found it helpful - if you did please subscribe and click the like button it will help others find these weekly services more easily.

Our next service will be available for week beginning Sunday 29th November.

BLESSING

Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might;
Let the word of God dwell in you;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father,
the Son and the Holy Spirit be among us
and remain with us always. Amen.