

## Sermon – Christ the King

Through the written word,  
and the spoken word,  
may we know your Living Word  
Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen

When it was announced that England would be going into a second lockdown for November, I saw University students become anxious at just another thing to deal with, something else to rock this already disrupted academic year. But what I also saw was societies and students coming together to remind their fellow students, that no matter how alone they might feel, that wasn't the truth. There was offers of shopping being delivered to those who had to isolate, study groups being set up on zoom, and even just being a listening ear. It was a bit of comfort after everything that students have had to face so far.

Next Sunday marks the beginning of Advent and as the commercial Christmas season begins to ramp up and spread through the shops, we prepare for the celebration of Jesus' first coming to our world. Jesus was brought onto Earth through Mary, an unmarried girl, born in a stable and cradled in a manger; he lived his life as a servant and teacher; at some points had no place to lay his head – these humble beginnings had a purpose though, that Jesus was able to dwell among us but doing so meant emptying himself. In our gospel today we are told of his second coming, Jesus's return to Earth, but this time he will not be emptying himself, he will come in all of his glory, with all of his angels, sitting on a throne, with all the nations before him and he will be the one to cast judgment.

It's very clear what we will be judged on, Jesus repeats it four times to his disciples. We will be judged on how we have treated those that are considered the "least of these", the hungry, the thirsty, a stranger, the sick, those in prison. Jesus has walked in the shoes of the "least of these" and suffered greatly when he came last, and it was when he was curing the sick, welcoming the despised and providing food for the hungry that He announced the arrival of His Father's kingdom. These are the things we do, donate money and food so that those who struggle to find the money can eat, offer care and attention to those who are sick, to be good people, and good Christians, but is there more we can do to prepare for when Jesus comes again?

We are told that, when Jesus comes to judge us, he will sort us, sheep from goats, and that likely made more sense to the people hearing it at the time. A shepherd would have to separate the goats from the sheep, as while the sheep were happy to stay outside when the weather got colder, the goats needed to be somewhere a little bit warmer. And you would definitely want to be a sheep at the time Jesus was preaching to his disciples; sheep were more valuable, and the goats may become the 'scapegoat' – the goat that was sacrificed in the temple. But while this task seems fairly easy now, I'm pretty sure I'd be able to tell a goat from a sheep if you put me in front of a field of them, but the difference between them didn't used to be so significant. If the shepherd was likely to struggle to tell the difference between the goats and the sheep, how can we be so sure that we would be able to do it as well? How can we be so sure that we would be able to tell if we ourselves or the others around us will be judged as a sheep or a goat?

In the Old Testament reading, it's not sheep and goats being judged, but only sheep. This passage tells us that God will always search for his people, no matter how far we may have gone, how much we are struggling, or why we may have strayed away; but that also we will be fed with justice. Here, it's the ones who have misused power or ignored the "least of these" who will be punished. But also, and I think almost more importantly, is the ones who have 'butted the weak away – scattering them

far and wide'. People don't always just stray from God on their own, or lose their faith just as they might lose an interest; some people are pushed away. A person could give as much money and time as they can to charity, feed as many homeless people, but if their words or actions are the reason God's people stray from Him, they will be sorted as the same as the people who have ignored the "least of these".

Earlier we talked about Jesus announcing the arrival of God's kingdom while he cared for the people who needed his help. But God's kingdom doesn't function like a typical kingdom we would think of. God's divine reign has already invaded the world and is good news; it's good news especially for those who we might consider at the fringes of society, and those who seek to serve others rather than exploit them. The other difference between God's kingdom and what we may think of as a kingdom is that it's not passed down to a single person, but instead to the righteous.

We are all part of God's family, the old testament reading tells us this, but we also hear it in the gospel. Although those who are sorted as sheep, and sit at the right hand of Jesus are called righteous, those who are sorted as goats are not ever referenced to as unrighteous. We are all blessed by God, blessed by Jesus, a king who brings real peace, who sees the needy, and who hears the cry of the oppressed. But Jesus will look to our actions, our treatment of those, and God's people when he comes in glory, with his angels, for the second time.

As we make our way through the second lockdown, and the trials of this year seem to be getting to all of us, let's cast our minds to the pulling together of our communities we all felt at the beginning of the first lockdown, and work to repeat the actions that this as we move through this season. We ourselves are unlikely to be able to tell the sheep from the goats, or the sheep from the sheep, but we can reflect on our actions and chose the ones that will take us down the right path; what can you do better to prepare for that day?