



For I was hungry
and you gave me
nothing to eat

Sunday, November 26th, 2017

EZEKIEL 34:11-16, 20-24;
PSALM 100;
EPHESIANS 1:15-23;
MATTHEW 25:31-46

1ST READING

A Reading from the Book of Ezekiel

For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

EZEKIEL 34:11-16, 20-24

PSALM 100

- 1 Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands; * serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song.
- 2 Know this: The Lord himself is God; * he himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
- 3 Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise; * give thanks to him and call upon his name.
- 4 For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; * and his faithfulness endures from age to age.

God our Father, you have created us as your people, and you sustain us with your hand. Help us always to give you thanks, for you alone are worthy of thanksgiving and praise and honour, now and for ever.

2ND READING

A Reading from the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

GOSPEL READING

The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Matthew

Jesus said, "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."

MATTHEW 25:31-46

Jesus said, "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.

Take a moment to picture what it would be like to be there when: "*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.*" I can't imagine anything that would overwhelm my senses, my very being more than to be a witness to such an occasion. The experience I believe would be beyond any description. We simply would not have the words.

But our imaginations can provide us with some images of such an event. We are told that Jesus begins to speak to all who are gathered — the nations and the people. We would likely be prepared to hear words of power and inspiration to do great things — right? Well, in the final analysis — yes.

But at first hearing, the message of Jesus to all is not what anyone would expect. What message does our Lord give to everyone as he, *comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, and sits on the throne of his glory?* What is burning in his mind so much that Jesus cannot wait any longer for them to hear. He now has everyone's attention. How does he sum up his leading statement for all people?

Well his summary statement is stated in two different ways:

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.

and

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.

He has provided us with two ways of saying that, the way we treat our neighbour is the way we are treating the Son of God. Jesus takes his love of people and his identification with them at a very deeply personal level. And that understanding takes precedence over any grand statements, promises or plans that Christ may also have for us.

What can this mean to us living in the *contemporary world*? No you are not imagining it. Last week's sermon on Queen Margaret of Scotland had a Gospel reading very similar to today's reading. Some may recall a radio program hosted by Paul Harvey. In this program, Harvey would tell of a noteworthy historical event that was familiar to most folk. But the stories as most people knew them were incomplete. So Paul Harvey made his living by telling listeners what was entitled, "The Rest of the Story". Often, the rest of a story would throw a different or insightful light on what really took place and its importance to us.

Well, the Gospel reading is much longer today because it tells us *the rest of the story*. Last week we heard about how Jesus brought together the nations of the world and divided them into good responsible nations (sheep) and into nations which were aloof to their responsibilities (goats). More specifically Jesus was letting us know that moral responsibility not only happens at a personal level; it equally belongs at a national level as well.

Let me illustrate how this might look by a scenario. Let's imagine a fictional country and let's give it a name — how about the country of Swoosh? Suppose there are many poor people in the nation of Swoosh. It is so bad that one can't move about town without encountering beggars. Some folk in their mercy share a small amount from their pockets to help those less fortunate. But still, the problem not only continues — it seems to be growing. Individual givings by various townsfolk seem to help some. At the same time, such givings are sporadic, not dependable, and rather hit and miss in terms of who may benefit and who may be missed altogether. At times, there may even be some risk of danger in the bringing of help to the needy. So are the people of Swoosh to give up and forget the poor in the face of such problems? I don't think so.

I believe that the power remains to address the problems of poverty in the land of Swoosh, more adequately, more fairly and more consistently. Yes, the nation of Swoosh can take action! How? By acting as a compassionate nation. Yes, nations can be compassionate, just like individual people can be compassionate! It is a matter of choice!

The downside will likely be that many people will complain about: *Swoosh being in danger of becoming a welfare state where government systems can be abused.* Yet, the bottom line of what mostly matters is for those who are not able to see to their own needs to actually get the help they need. And yes, the reality of life is that some people may never be able to be self-supporting. But as children of God, as members of God's family, Jesus expects us to love and assist them as needed despite any problems and criticisms. Now this can seem to be unrealistic and maybe not very wise. So we may wonder how important is this really, to Jesus.

This takes our attention to the Paul Harvey moment — *the rest of the story.* In today's additional verses, the mood of our Lord takes off in an unexpected direction. Jesus suddenly starts putting things into a negative context. So much does he want to get this point across:

- so much does he care about those on the fringes of society
- so important is this to Jesus that he says things like, *I was hungry and you gave me no food....*

Not only is Christ taking good deeds for the helpless as being appreciated as though he was the direct recipient — Jesus now turns things around and lets us know that he takes personally a lack of any action on behalf of the needy. Ignore the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, those without clothing or shelter — turn your back on these and you will find yourself glancing away from Jesus. Now how wise is that? Not very.

Last week, I mentioned an old familiar saying among some politicians — *By your followers you will be led.* Especially in democratic nations this saying can often be seen at work. Those elected to power have to pay attention to those over whom they have this power. So if enough individuals care about an issue, so will those in positions of responsibility if they want to remain in their seats.

When we notice any of God's children being mistreated or in dire straits, Jesus calls us to act as we can. Sometimes direct action may be best. Other times appropriate agencies need to be notified. And yet, other times new policies need to be put in place to alleviate troubling situations. That can come from advocacy or simply by a vote on election day. The point is for us to find ourselves on the side of love and compassion when these issues or situations present themselves.

God cares and frequently gives us a variety of means of being helpful. God does not only work alone. God seeks to work through God's people — you and me and countless more — as nations and as individuals.

Thanks be to Christ the King — a king like no other!