

Reign of Christ

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By Janet Foggie

Introduction

Matthew 25:31-46

“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.”

Text

It has been a time, recently, in world politics, to think of winners and losers. The world watched gripped as the votes were counted between Joe Biden and Donald Trump in the USA. The winner emerged, the loser must now find a new path.

I wonder what we hear of winners and losers in Jesus' statements about himself?

‘I was hungry.

I was thirsty.

I was naked.

I was in prison.’

He identifies with those who cannot meet their basic needs, who do not have their freedom. The world Jesus sees, hears and describes is a broken world of lost and victimised people.

In our COVID-19 reality, while hopes of a vaccine are still in the air, the world we face is one filled of many forms of brokenness. There are more children going to bed hungry in the UK than there have been for generations, jobs have been lost and more hang in the balance. The plight of refugees and asylum seekers has become a political football where the realities of hunger, thirst, nakedness and prison are faced by the innocent.

The restrictions put in place to prevent the virus from spreading also prevent much of the good work which community groups, churches and charities do to alleviate suffering of this kind. A high proportion of the UK’s charities are under the real threat of closure, as many of the ways in which we give to charity, from street collections to charity dinners, are cancelled or postponed. The feeling of being imprisoned in a less direct sense by the curfews and the travel restrictions sits with us all.

For many of us the brokenness sits with being unable to visit family or friends, lacking the companionship of familiar faces and places. We hunger for company, for bread shared together, for the warmth of a meal, conversation, even just a meeting in a café for a coffee.

Yet this can become a far more serious sort of imprisonment for the elderly or those with health complications who find themselves in real danger from the virus that the more healthy among us may not even be aware that they are spreading. The loss of loved ones at a distance and without the ability to travel adds to the hunger and thirst for empathy, for shared grief, and for the food and fellowship that came previously with mourning.

King of brokenness, Jesus sees whatever kindness we offer in these difficult times. He hears the sympathetic voice, the helpful listening ear, the gentle offer of companionship. Equally he knows those who provide food, who offer clothing, who ‘visit’ by internet or phone.

In a time where poverty, vulnerability and isolation are inevitably increased, Christ the King is there with the losers, the poor and the alone, and he is seeing all who provide them with aid.

Normally a Sunday for jubilation and perhaps self-serving observations about the Church, The Reign of Christ is often preached as the herald of a new dawn of winners. The King himself, however, has no time for those who only see themselves. Those who wish to declare themselves the victors are liable to find themselves asking, ‘When did we see you?’ While, Christ’s eyes are on those who see and serve others.

Comment

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins describes those people who are kind to him, who always had a home for him in his poem 'In the Valley of the Elwy':

'I remember a house where all were good
To me, God knows, deserving no such thing:
Comforting smell breathed at very entering,
Fetched fresh, as I suppose, off some sweet wood.'

Do we have a place or a friend or a family member where we would like to go, where comfort and support was always available. How has COVID-19 changed that reality?

Were we perhaps the bolt-hole for another person or people? Can we try to recreate that comfort and support online? Or at a distance? How have we negotiated and renewed our friendships?

What of those who have no-where to go? Can we see and hear them with the eyes and ears of Christ the King?

Prayer

God of the losers,
who inhabits the hungry, the thirsty,
the naked, those in prison,
whose kingship is one of love,
enable us to find a way
in this world of restrictions and fears,
to build friendships,
to find time for each other,
to lift the phone or make a contact, and,
in sharing our brokenness and restrictedness
may we find divinity in that moment with each other.

Through Christ the King,

Amen