

## Christ the King

November 26, 2017

Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

Allowing others to minister to us.

The brothers were confused. Try as they might, they couldn't tell their two horses apart. They tried calling them and they both responded equally to the others name. They tried measuring them and they were exactly the same height. It wasn't until they were talking to a scientist from Lincoln University that they discovered that the nose print on each horse, much like our fingerprint, is unique. Sure enough the nose print on the white horse was totally different from that on the black horse.

Telling two animals apart is at the heart of our reading for today. We have Christ the King separating the goats from the sheep. It would have been a commonplace activity in Jesus day. They would have slept together in a cave, got all muddled up, and then come the morning they needed to be sorted out. I thought this might be really hard until I read Reginald H Fuller. He told me that the goats would have been black and the sheep white. Problem solved.

But today's Gospel is not so much advice for a degree in animal husbandry as a snapshot of a future judgement. The meaning of the passage seems pretty clear: when we show mercy to strangers and poor people and sick people and people in prison we become a sheep and we get rewarded. Many times preachers use this text to encourage people into greater acts of kindness. I heard a sermon just like that at a City Mission carol service. But when Jesus is talking about doing an act of kindness to, "the family" he is talking about the family of disciples, he is talking about you and me. The family in Matthew always means the disciples. To quote Fuller again, "Hunger and thirst symbolize the weakness and poverty of us the disciples."

This is good news. This is grace news. Coming at the end of our church year, and just as we come into Advent, we aren't a community that needs encouragement to do more. Rather, I think we need to allow others to minister to us, to allow Jesus to minister to us.

I believe we are a caring congregation, a bunch who do serve willingly, a family that takes in the stranger and cares for the poor. If anything, we could be suffering from a little bit of serving burnout.

So often in my work I meet people who through pride or misplaced independence do not allow others to show them compassion:

A friend opens a door before them, "Here, let me get that."

A concerned daughter comes around, "I think it's time you thought of a rest home mum."

"They'll carry me out in a box first."

The vicar suggests "Would you be open to getting some counselling?"

"Are you saying I'm nuts!"

"Would you like to join us for Christmas dinner?"

"No I'd rather be on my own, to think about the good old days."

"We're going that way. Can we give you a lift?"

Maybe it's a middle class Anglican thing but sometimes we try and out do each other in being difficult to help. Like the joke; "How many mothers does it take to change a light bulb?". Answer: none. "Don't worry about me dear, I'll sit here in the dark all on my own. You go out and enjoy yourself."

For the transaction of compassion to be made there needs to be two to tango. For each of the acts of mercy: clothing the naked, etc there had to be someone who was prepared to be helped.

This is what makes the begging problem so bad in our city, not the poverty, but people who just don't want to be helped.

We sometimes sing that song, The Servant Song. In it is that great line, "May I have the grace to let you be my servant too."

Before I was married and had children and a mortgage, I did what kids today call a gap year. I went to Victoria University, did some papers and worked as a university chaplain. I lived in little house right at the university named after Michael Ramsey, a brilliant Archbishop of Canterbury. It was my job to support the students. Under the flat we had a lounge, library, toilets, a kitchen and wee chapel. Students and some staff would drop in during the day and we ran various programmes for them. Each Monday it was my job to make the soup and buns. Students would come from all around for a free feed. This particular Monday I was exhausted. I had been pushing myself too hard and had some sort of flu. So what to do? There was no book of faces to tell everyone it was off. So I just took myself downstairs and lay on the sofa. What should have been a disaster turned out to be the best day of ministry I ever did. People would come in see I was sick and come over and talk to me. Some found out that I hadn't done the soup so they set to and

made the soup and heated the buns. Some others formed a sort of protective shield around me so I didn't get overwhelmed - sort of like they do for Robert Mugabe. One, who is now the Baptist minister in Opawa, prayed for me. The group that did the soup went on to form a roster each week. I listened really well, because I was too sick to do anything else. I had to stop and allow others to minister to me. The only downside was that, within a week, the whole of the university had that flu.

It was Matthew in another part of his Gospel that recounted for us Jesus words, "Come to me all who are heavy laden and I will give you rest." In our poverty of time, in our sickness, in the demands of our lives, we need to come to Jesus and lay down our burdens. This coming week can I encourage you to think not just about what you can do for others but about how you can have the grace to allow others to minister to you. None of us can do it alone, we all need each other.

As we come into the new church year and all the excitement that follows, may we have a heart of compassion but may we also have one of grace that allows others to minister to us.