



Sunday 22nd November 2020 10:30 am

Deacon Sally Wheadon and Rev'd Nico Hilmy-Jones

Welcome

& Lighting of the Candle

Call to Worship *(based on Psalm 100)*

Shout with joy to God because we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. God is the One who made us. The One who sustains us. The One whose Spirit lives within us. Let us enter God's house with thanksgiving; and come into God's presence with praise. For God is good, offering us unconditional love that lasts forever and faithfulness that extends to all generations.

AMEN.

Hymn: StF 443

Come let us sing of a wonderful

love, - tender and true;

out of the heart

of the Father above,

streaming to me and to you:

wonderful love - dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell, - joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;

seeking the lost, - saving,
redeeming at measureless cost.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet; - why do they roam?

Love only waits

to forgive and forget; -

Home! weary wanderers, home!

Wonderful love - dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Come to my heart, O Thou wonderful love, - come and abide,
lifting my life till it rises above envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be - lowly and humble, a learner of Thee.

Robert Walmsley (1831-1905) - Used By Permission. Calamus Licence No. A-734967

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, We thank you that you care for us so deeply that you love even the least among us. We praise you for the way you honour all people and speak even into the most difficult places of our world. As we come before you, open our hearts and stretch our compassion to see those whom you love and you cherish. May we honour you in all we do

not by mere words but by our very actions, trusting in you to lead us. We ask that you teach us to love in your name, speak in your name, care in your name even when we are unsure. Calm our minds and hearts so we may be like Jesus and touch the outcast, feed the hungry, tend to the sick, visit the imprisoned, clothe the naked and give water to the thirsty, always lifting your name up as we do it. Be with us now as we seek to worship you and to gather in your presence as the body of Christ.

Loving God, as we stand before you may our hearts unfold and open to those who are in great need. Forgive us when we fall short as your Disciples, seeking to only tend to those who we know and who are safe, rather than taking risks to reach out to those on the margin. Forgive us when we can not reach out unless you reach through us, nor give except you give through us. We offer our imperfect lives and closed hearts to the transforming power of your love. Free us from the bondage of self and let the miracle of your love be expressed through these

flawed hearts. As you trust in God's grace and love, unburden your sins and know that you are forgiven and be at peace. We ask this in the name of Jesus. **AMEN.** *And now let us say the prayer that Jesus taught us to say:*

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. **AMEN.**

>>> **Video Clip** >>>>

Hymn: StF 256

When I needed a neighbour

were you there, were you there?

When I needed a neighbour

were you there?

*And the creed and the colour
and the name won't matter,
Were you there?*

I was hungry and thirsty,
were you there, were you there?

I was hungry and thirsty,
were you there? *Chorus*

I was cold, I was naked,
were you there, were you there?
I was cold, I was naked,
were you there? *Chorus*

When I needed a shelter
were you there, were you there?
When I needed a shelter
were you there? *Chorus*

When I needed a healer
were you there, were you there?
When I needed a healer
were you there? *Chorus*

Wherever you travel
I'll be there, I'll be there,
Wherever you travel I'll be there.
*And the creed and the colour
and the name won't matter,
I'll be there.*

Sydney Carter (1915-2004)

© 1965 Stainer & Bell Ltd.

Used By Permission. CCL Licence No. 284784



READINGS:

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Matthew 25:31-46

Reflections: Deacon Sally

When reflecting on the story of the sheep and the goats for this service, I asked a Christian friend for her take on it. Well, not being one to beat about the bush, she said “it frightens me; every time I walk past a homeless person or someone in need, I hear this passage reverberating around my ears and it frightens me because I’m paranoid that I’ll be the person to whom Jesus asks: Where were you when I needed you?” And I guess when I think of it in that light, it frightens me too. But, if not to scare, I think Jesus’ intention here was certainly to challenge and to serve a warning because, if we look back through the Bible, God’s heart is always for the poor and the marginalised.

Going right back to the Exodus, in freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, God shows that he will not tolerate oppression and exploitation. And having set them free, in Deuteronomy, God calls the Israelites to share the blessings that they were enjoying in the land that he had given them with the orphan, the

widow and the foreigner. Time and time again, when Israel strayed from this calling, God used the prophets to call them back. Through the prophet Amos, God calls for justice to roll on like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream; through the prophet Micah, God tells the Israelites what he requires of them, namely to act justly and to love mercy. In our Ezekiel reading this morning, such is God’s outrage at the way shepherds of Israel had treated their flock that he declares that he, himself, would rescue the scattered sheep and look after them. Indeed, God says – “I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.” There’s that word again – justice!

And reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue at the start of his ministry, Jesus announces that God has anointed him to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the

prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind and to set the oppressed free. And continuing the shepherding analogy, Israelite kings were shepherd kings like David and as such, they were expected to protect their flock from invading armies and from injustice and oppression within. Hence in John's gospel Jesus declares himself to be the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

But returning to today's passage, when Jesus describes what will happen when he returns in glory and the nations are gathered before him, he again uses the shepherding analogy. And he uses this analogy because sheep and goats were, and can be, herded together because they tend to eat different things. Sheep like the clover near the ground and the goats eat everything else. However, sheep are gentle, quiet and easily led animals. Goats on the other hand are pushy, self-sufficient, and headstrong. Sheep tend to be passive animals, while goats have more aggressive tendencies. Goats are naturally quarrelsome

and have short tempers. They rear and butt in order to establish dominance. They are not herded as well as sheep because they would rather lead than follow. Typically, a shepherd in Palestine allowed sheep and goats to mingle together during the day. However, at night, he separated the sheep from the goats through his unique call. The sheep would sleep in the open air, while the goats needed the heat of close quarters.

When we reflect on the characteristics of sheep and goats, perhaps it's no coincidence that Jesus, who starts his teaching ministry in Matthew's gospel with the Beatitudes, ends with the story of the sheep and the goats. You see, while in our culture, we tend to see sheep as stupid animals and are more likely to favour the curious, independent and feisty goats, the Israelites tolerated the goats but favoured the sheep. Indeed, the Bible sides with the sheep. So do the sheep in this story represent the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek,

those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart and the peacemakers, essentially all those who Jesus calls blessed in the Beatitudes. One could argue that the story of the sheep and the goats is an appropriate bookend to the Beatitudes.

But while the sheep and goats undoubtedly have different characteristics, they do have one thing in common. They both ask the same questions – ‘When did we see you hungry or thirsty? When did we see you a stranger or needing clothes? When did we see you ill or in prison?’ The truth is neither group recognised Jesus but the difference is, the sheep got on and fed the hungry anyway. They gave drink to the thirsty, they welcomed the stranger, they clothed the naked, and they visited the sick and the prisoner anyway whereas the goats did not. And I think the essential difference between the sheep and the goats is their heart and their nature. It is in the very nature of the sheep to do these things because their heart is in

tune with God’s heart, a heart for the poor and marginalised.

The goats on the other hand, whom I’ve no doubt would have responded if they knew it was Jesus who was asking, seem to represent people who only act if there is some recognition or perceived reward in it for them.

While researching for today’s reflection, I came across sermons which suggest that the sheep in this story represent ‘God’s family’ and that when doing good to others, we need go no further than our Christian sisters and brothers. However, I cannot say that I agree with that teaching. For me, that is to limit the gospel, that is to put ourselves in with the goats – “Lord, we didn’t respond because you didn’t look like one of us.”

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the teacher of the law was looking to limit the extent of his responsibility to others by asking Jesus to define exactly who his neighbour was. But rather than narrowing down our responsibility, Jesus expands it.

In the parable he shows us that actually, although the Jews and the Samaritans weren't the best of friends and although they worshipped God in different ways, it was the Samaritan who was a neighbour to the Jewish man who was in trouble because he was the one who showed mercy. And Jesus calls us to do the same.

So, to sum up, for me, what the King in the story seems to praise is the instinctive response to human need. It wasn't about the act that was done or not done; it wasn't about whether the person was deserving or not deserving or whether someone consciously responded out of sense of Christian duty. What matters to God is our heart and our openness to responding compassionately to human need regardless of the person or the circumstance.

When asked what the greatest commandment in the Law is, Jesus replied "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." And then he said "and the

second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself."



Hymn: StF 699

God of justice, Saviour to all,
came to rescue
the weak and the poor;
chose to serve and not be served.
Jesus, you have called us.
Freely we've received, now freely
we will give.

*We must go,
live to feed the hungry,
stand beside the broken,
we must go.
Stepping forward
keep us from just singing,
move us into action,
we must go.*

To act justly every day,
loving mercy in every way,
walking humbly before you, God.
You have shown us
what you require.
Freely we've received,
now freely we will give.

Chorus

*Fill us up and send us out,
fill us up and send us out,
fill us up and send us out, Lord.
(Repeat x 2)*

Chorus

*Tim Hughes (born 1978)
© 2005 Thankyou Music - Used By
Permission. CCL Licence No. 284784*

Prayers of Intercession

Christ the King, shepherd,
teacher, compassionate friend
We come to You amidst the
turmoil of life and pray that,
by the power of Your Holy Spirit,
You would teach us afresh to
serve others, and so, serve You.

We pray for Your worldwide
church, that You would open our
eyes to ways in which to share the
joy of knowing You.

We pray for the hungry across the
world, and for those closer to
home whose lives have been
turned upside down by the
pandemic, causing them to rely
on the grace of Food Banks.

We pray for the thirsty;
For those who have to walk miles
to find clean water,
and for those who are forced to
drink from unsafe sources.

We pray for those living without
shelter; For those who have lost
their homes through natural
disaster, and for those who can
no longer afford to pay their rent
or mortgage.

We pray for those unable to meet
the basic needs of life,

For those struggling to keep their
families warm, and for those for
whom a coat is but a dream.

We pray for those in prison,
For those coming to terms with
the nature of their crimes,
and for those who show no
remorse.

And in a few moments of quiet,
we pray for those who are
suffering ill health, be it physically
or mentally, and for those
grieving the loss of loved ones.

Compassionate Lord, teacher and
friend You have taught us how to
serve. May we go with eyes
freshly opened as to ways in
which we can bless and serve
others, and so, serve You. **Amen**

Hymn: StF 317

- 1 At the name of Jesus**
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word.
- 2 Humbled for a season,**
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it

spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed:

May the blessing of God the Father,
Son and Holy Spirit, be among us and
remain with us always. **AMEN.**

3 Bore it up triumphant
with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures
to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead,
to the Father's breast;
filled it with the glory
of that perfect rest.

4 In your hearts enthrone him;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true;
crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.

5 For this same Lord Jesus
shall return again,
with his Father's glory,
with his angel train;
all the wreaths of empire
meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel (1817-1877)

Blessing and Benediction

May the peace of God be with you.
May the light of Jesus shine upon
your path and may the joy of the
Holy Spirit be your strength.