

Sermon 22 November 2020 – Treasure Sunday

Ephesians 1:15 to end. Matthew 25:31 to end

Paul's prayer for the people at Ephesus is that God will give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation.....so, that with the eyes of their hearts enlightened, they will know hope.

It's like saying that their, our, eyes are opened to see God's light, to see God's love. And to see that Jesus' hands in this world now are the hands of those who follow him.

Each week on Sacred Space, an app I use for daily prayer and meditation, there's a thought for the week.

This week we were invited to focus on God's love and God's gifts.

But by the time I came to put pen to paper, finger to key board, the thought for the next coming week had replaced the one that had captured my attention, so this may not replicate it properly, and it's certainly not in the same order.

What I remember is that:

The love of God is like the sea. The sea going out and the sea coming in. A love pouring out and love pouring back – in and out, again and again

Picture those waves of love. Filling us up and then as we are emptied by pouring out that love to others, so we are refilled as the next wave comes in. Perhaps a bit splashy, maybe a bit messy, sometimes overwhelming, sometimes more of a gentle intake of breath rather than a crash of salt, wind and water. But never ceasing, pulled in and out by that true spirit – the spirit of love.

And the gifts of God are: love relationship giving receiving forgiveness compassion peace presence

I was drawn to the way they have been paired together. Love draws us into relationship. Giving helps us to receive. Forgiveness, both given and received, develops compassion. Peace brings us into the presence of God.

And the presence of God, we learn from scripture, is an awesome thing.

In our gospel reading Jesus tells his last parable. One of a judgment of the nations. He warns of the possibility of blessing some and condemning others. He refers to them as sheep and goats.

A few years ago I was delighted to find that there are regulations in this country that specify how to identify sheep and goats. It's mostly about what sort of ear tag each should wear, but it pleases me to see a semi-biblical reference in agricultural law.

For, in an agricultural setting, goats are separated from sheep at night, because they find it harder to keep warm. They are more vulnerable. The shepherd has to pay more attention to them if they are to survive. Which is strange because I don't know about you, but I tend to think of goats as being more hardy. Does it perhaps mean that those who Jesus warns about condemnation, are in fact more vulnerable than those who are blessed?

If we look at the reason why Jesus blesses the first group. It is because they live a life of love. Jesus identifies feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, welcoming a stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting those in prison, as times when they have cared for Jesus himself. They don't do it to curry favour with Jesus, or because of some religious law or command, they just do it out of compassion, out of mercy, out of love. Using the resources given to them, like the sea pouring in and enabling them to pour out again God's love to others.

This year with all its uncertainty, its restrictions, the underlying anxiety and fear, has given us a taste of the uncertainty, restrictions and fear that so many of the world's population normally experience without the added complication of covid.

When we think of those who are hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, imprisoned, homeless, fearful, who do we see? Do we see people around us in Bristol? Do we see people in other countries?

One of the ways in which we collectively respond to Jesus' parable is to support St Peter's outreach giving. In any other year we would have held events, times when we would have to come together to enjoy each others company, usually

to eat and drink, to listen to stories and music, to compete in quizzes, to stock up on Christmas cards and gifts. We held one event this year – the first Café Create, we had hoped it would become a frequent event.

We aim to give at least £6,000 each year. Last year we raised and gave away over 7 and a half thousand pounds to local charities and overseas.

Each year we mark this Sunday as 'Treasure Sunday'. We invite everyone to review their giving.

This year we are inviting everyone to consider giving to our outreach funds.

You should all have received a letter from Mark, supported by information from David Fenna (our Treasurer), setting out the charities and good causes that we currently support and the sums we gave last year, and the money we have received thus far in 2020 donations.

The causes we support locally reach some of the most vulnerable in this city.

The Sisters of the Church, through the loaves and fishes project, offer a food parcel to anyone who calls asking for one. They say 'We judge no one, we ask no questions except their name. Anyone and everyone is welcome. No justification is needed. Our only restriction is that one parcel is given per person, per week.' They feed the hungry. They feed Jesus.

B:Friend provides asylum seekers and refugees with one-to-one support. They match a volunteer with an asylum seeker or refugee for a period of up to one year, Befriending is listening, drinking tea, laughing, being compassionate, hearing difficult stories, showing empathy, visiting a museum or art gallery, being committed, going for a walk together, learning from another culture

They welcome the stranger, they welcome Jesus

Last year **One 25** worked with 241 women in Bristol. 154 women were supported around housing, mental health, addiction, domestic and sexual violence, finance, wellbeing and the criminal justice system. 37 stopped street sex-working and 48 women at risk were helped to avoid life on the streets.

They care for the sick, the 'imprisoned' those who are afraid. They care for Jesus.

Overseas we have a long standing relationship with the **Diocese of Northern Uganda**. Supporting them through times of civil war, and in peace. Helping them as they help refugees from South Sudan. The pandemic has taken away much of the livelihood of their clergy and their congregations. Costs of transport and food have doubled. They know hunger, thirst and sickness. We can help care for them.

Embrace ME helps people of all faiths and none to free themselves from a life of poverty and injustice. Together with local Christian communities they are bringing lasting change to the Middle East through healthcare, education and community development projects. They model Jesus' call for justice.

Anne Plested, working with CMS, lives and works in Bethlehem, teaching at the Bible College She also helps with English language teaching, enabling students to improve their educational and job prospects by becoming fluent in English. Again, modelling Jesus' call for justice.

Can we raise £6,000+ in the next two weeks, the sum we would normally have raised in ten months?
Please read the letter you have had from Mark.

Please pray faithfullyabout how God is calling you to respond
Please listen well.....to the needs of those facing difficulty
Please act boldly.....and surprise yourself with the amount you give
Please serve generously..... and respond sacrificially to this call.

As with those in Ephesus, may our eyes be opened to see God's light, to see God's love. And to see that Jesus' hands in this world now are the hands of those who follow him, our hands

Sarah Thomas 22 November 2020