

Gospel reflections

Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."



Which is the sheep? Which is the goat?

I remember the first time I stood in front of the barbary sheep enclosure at the Adelaide zoo. I was certainly challenged in my prior knowledge of sheep and goats. I could not help but wonder about the story that Jesus told about the separating of sheep and goats. It really had me thinking that we certainly might have lost something in time, place and translation.

This story occurs after the three parables of the talents, the bridesmaids and unfaithful and faithful slaves and they all stress waiting and preparing (or not) for the return of Christ. It is a little different and takes us forward to the moment when Jesus comes again. The nations are assembled and the sheep are separated from the goats (vv. 32-33). The audience for Matthew's story is the early persecuted Christian community who Matthew's Jesus seeks to equip and empower.

Many people have used the story about the sheep and the goats to argue that "getting into heaven" is merely a matter of doing good works or being a good person. However, the gospels are very clear that there is only one way to be made right with God and this is through Jesus. As I prepared for the reflection this week, the following passage provided some insights that I found helpful.

"I looked harder at Matthew 25 and realized that if Jesus said "I was hungry and you fed me," then Christ's presence is not embodied in those who feed the hungry (as important as that work is), but Christ's presence is in the hungry being fed. Christ comes not in the form of those who visit the imprisoned but in the imprisoned being cared for. And to be clear, Christ does not come to us as

the poor and hungry. Because, as anyone for whom the poor are not an abstraction but actual flesh-and-blood people knows, the poor and hungry and imprisoned are not a romantic special class of Christ like people. And those who meet their needs are not a romantic special class of Christ like people. We all are equally as sinful and saintly as the other. No, Christ comes to us in the needs of the poor and hungry, needs that are met by another so that the gleaming redemption of God might be known. ... No one gets to play Jesus. But we do get to experience Jesus in that holy place where we meet others' needs and have our own needs met." *Nadia Bolz-Weber, Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People*

Can you tell the difference between a sheep and a goat? Which one would you hope to be? God only knows, but in a year that has probably blown your mind in terms of serving the needs of those in your school and wider community. A year that has called your staff to wrap the students and their families in love, care, some certainty, and hope in these most uncertain times. Please take a moment to wonder about this story and imagine Jesus coming to sit beside you and listen as he says the following words to you...
"Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me."

Loving God,
revealed to us in Jesus of Nazareth,
present with us now through your Spirit,
we hear your call to care
for the lost, the last, the little, and the least
that even through us, your grace may touch their lives.
Amen.

Songs:
Ryan Stevenson [No matter what](#)
Newsboys [Love one another](#)

Blessings,
Anne

