

Sermon Christ the King Sunday 26/11/2023

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 95:1-7; Ephesians 1: 15-23; Matt 25: 31-46

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen

Amen

In the middle of November, we hosted an inaugural ecumenical service of remembrance and thanksgiving, marking the lives of those who had died in homelessness and celebrating new lives born into the care of the De Paul Ireland homeless charity. The service was heartfelt, meaningful and a little chaotic because so many people had generously given of their time and gifts to contribute. I was repeatedly called 'Sister' so am clearly in the wrong habit, and Tom Little, our amazing choral director, had to play Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' on the organ for one of the choirs. I think we are both still in recovery!

What was most apparent throughout that service was the sense of care from the staff of the homeless charity for those who they served and the sense of affection and genuine concern from the many who attended. For all involved in that service, homeless people were not just statistics, or those on the margins of society from whom we avert our eyes. They were embraced as real people, with hopes and dreams, people who deserved to be loved and who deserved to be given a real chance at life. I was genuinely glad to take a small part in that service, and delighted that the cathedral got the opportunity to host it.

It is almost six months since we launched a report about the cathedral entitled *Shining the light of Christ into the heart of the City*. I reflected on the day of the homeless service that hosting it was one small way in which we could shine Christ's light to those around us in Dublin. Through that service a few weeks ago, we centred those who are homeless, and those who care for them. It was a

small step, but a very worthwhile one and I hope that it will be far from a one-off.

We Christians declare ourselves as disciples of Jesus. We pledge ourselves regularly to faithfully follow his teachings. As Christians, we are called to care for others, not just those like ourselves, but in a very particular way, those on the margins of society. That is not always the easiest or the most instinctive thing for us human beings – I think we are wired to look after our own first and we can struggle to care about those who are neither related to us, nor part of our circle of friends. Yet those are exactly the people Jesus told us we should prioritise.

In this morning's Gospel we are given a pen-portrait of Christ the King, sitting on a throne in his glory, surrounded by all his angels. Christ the King sits in judgement and separates the people one from another, depending on how they have acted during their lives. The particular focus of Christ's judgement is on how we have treated those who are hungry, or thirsty, or strangers in our land, or naked, or sick, or in prison. We are to be judged based on how we have responded to the marginalised, the vulnerable, the unwanted, the ones that society thinks do not matter.

It is also well worth focusing on exactly what Jesus says the Son of Man will judge us for. He says that those among us who have actively involved ourselves in responding to the needs of the marginalised, the vulnerable and the unwanted are the ones who have followed his teaching. Those among us who have ignored the same people will be harshly judged.

In this Gospel reading, it is made starkly clear that if we call ourselves Christians we are going to be judged against the standard of what Jesus himself did when he walked among us. Let's reflect on a few examples. Jesus welcomed those of low status – he said 'let the little children come to me' rather than allowing the disciples to shoo them away as pests. He told Zacchaeus the tax collector 'hurry down for I must stay at your house tonight'. He asked the Samaritan woman at the well for a drink despite the fact that Jews did not interact at all with Samaritans. The scribes and pharisees were never done complaining about him because he ate with known sinners. He interacted compassionately with beggars and prostitutes. He healed the sick of mind and body, even the feared and outcast lepers. These are some examples of Jesus's inclusive care against which we will be measured and judged.

Now I want you to imagine this morning that it is we who are before the Son of Man on his throne in glory, surrounded by his angels. He is judging us. I know that many of us here could say honestly, but look Lord, I gave money to good causes. I was always generous when there was a fund-raiser on. I was in church every Sunday and always gave to the collection. Is that really enough in his eyes? He may say to us, yes that was great, but what more did you do?

I suggest to you that we are being asked to go beyond just giving money to good causes so that others can do the physical caring on our behalf. Yes, we are certainly called to be generous and to share what we have to the best of our abilities. But we are also being challenged to be a bit more hands-on in the care that we give to others. This is not just a call to us as individuals, but it is also a call to us as a cathedral community to respond actively to the needs of the marginalised.

We are called as individuals and called as a cathedral community to shine Christ's light into the city of Dublin. We are currently being challenged by the things happening in our city and in our wider world, called to find generous and hands-on ways that we can respond to old and new needs. Given the events of the last few days, we can start by speaking up positively and actively supporting those who are newcomers into our country and city, beginning (but certainly not ending) with those who are part of our cathedral community.

We are also called to actively support the diocesan appeal for our sister Anglican diocese in the Middle East. There is an elderly lady who was one of my sponsors for ordination. She has been housebound these past few years. She can no longer go out doing the hands-on care for others she used to do for decades. Regardless of her confinement to home, by lunchtime yesterday she had raised €700 for the diocesan appeal from her orthopaedic chair. The diocesan appeal is to be formally launched on 4th December in our neighbouring parish of St. Ann's in Dawson Street. Let's generously support these efforts to give care to those far from our shores who are suffering greatly due to conflict.

Let us pray

Jesus who is Christ the king is a model of generosity and compassion, in particular for those who are on the margins of our society. God, give us the grace to mirror the caring actions of Jesus so that when we stand before your throne of judgement we can honestly say that we gave generously to those in need and took care of the vulnerable in any way that we could. **Amen**