

Surely in his earthly life Jesus set us the example of breaking away from our prejudices, the ideas we learned yesterday, so that in our todays we can build into our praise, our worship, our ministry in our daily lives those challenges of caring. If as Isaiah suggests (11:6) *The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together*, then perhaps the sheep and the goats can live and work together in harmony.

A Prayer

God, when we look around, we see so much need.

And we wonder how best to respond.

God, we hear your voice in the old stories.

Challenging us to feed the hungry, to visit the lonely, to comfort the suffering.

Not in search of reward or payback

but simply because it is the loving thing to do.

God of grace, we hear the voice, we understand the challenge

but we find it hard to live out. God of grace, give us the grace to live the way of love. ...time of silent prayer...

God challenges us to be people of love. In grace God helps us along the way.

In mercy, God works with us through our mis-steps and our misunderstandings. We are forgiven, set back on the path, and urged to try again. This is Good News.

Thanks be to God! Amen

<http://worshipofferings.blogspot.com/2015/03/for-march-22-looking-at-parable-of.html>

A Closing Prayer

God formed us from the good earth; the dust of the ground; male and female; created in God's image; and brought us to life through the breath of His Spirit. So we go out into His world, created for every living thing, to partner with, work with, care for His people, His world, in hope and joy and praise, knowing that God, parent, child, spirit of life is with us always.

Amen

With thanks to Shirley Colless for preparing today's reflection



Church in a Bag
22 November 2020

Dubbo Uniting Church



Call to Worship

May the Peace of Christ be with us

We have been called together to celebrate God's presence
to listen for God's wisdom
to be renewed as God's servants.

A Prayer

God of life, who calls us to be the church

**we gather together as a community
to listen for how you are speaking to us today.**

God of justice, who calls us to live lives of love

**we gather as a community of people
who try to understand what that means day to day.**

God of promise, who calls us to be people of hope

**we gather as people who are
looking for signs that the Kingdom is being made real in our midst.**

In this time of worship

refresh us, challenge us, renew us.

We pray in the name of the one

who taught about the way of love

who challenges us to serve each other.

Preparation

This day of worship concludes the Christian year – we have moved through Advent and Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus, through Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost – and now on this day of the feast of Christ the King, we read in Matthew of Jesus coming in glory to sit on a throne and judge us all, separating the good from the evil, rewarding and punishing.



It's a classic story about Us and Them, about separating people based on a presumption of their goodness or lack of goodness. And that only too sadly resonates far too strongly with how we order our world today.

Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

Judgement, reward and punishment

What does this passage say to us of the Jesus who likened himself to a humble, despised shepherd; protecting the flock, leading his flock (not driving them), ensuring their safety, searching for the lost and the strayed sheep, prepared to put himself in danger to protect his flock.



At the beginning of Jesus' life it was shepherds who came in awe and wonder to see the child, shepherds who In Christ's day, stood on the bottom rung of the Palestinian social ladder. They shared the same unenviable status as tax collectors and dung sweepers. Only Luke mentions them – Matthew doesn't. But all through today's readings we find reference to God's shepherding of his sheep –



Ezekiel, 34:12 - *As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.*

Psalm 100:3 - *Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

Psalm 95:7a - *For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

But in Ezekiel 34:20 there is also an indication of judgement, *Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.*

So, there is a big difference in the judgement meted out by God, no mention of glory and thrones, judging only sheep; and Matthew's account of Jesus in glory, enthroned, backed by a posse of angels, judging between two different animals.

And the judgement is absolute: the sheep are perfect and the goats have no redeeming features. The sheep are all rewarded – the goats are all condemned. That's it. It's a classic case of Us and Them and sadly over the millennia the idea of Us and Them became entrenched both in Christianity and in our society in general.

And who of us can claim to be perfect sheep, who of us know people who are absolute goats? If the criteria for reward is that the hungry were fed, the thirsty given water, the stranger welcomed into our country and our neighbourhoods, the naked clothed, the sick taken care of, prisoners visited, then the thousands, the millions of people outside the Christian Church, outside of Faith, who day by day do those things should be rewarded.

The Children of Israel believed in the One God, *Yahweh*, but they believed that *Yahweh* belonged exclusively to them, could not be shared with any other peoples (including the other descendants of Abraham through Ishmael and Esau). *Yahweh* would save them, judge them, provide for them – but not anybody else. In Jesus' time this was what his people believed, the classic Us and Them – and Jesus blew all that apart – he ministered to both Jews and Gentiles – the Centurion, the Syro-Phoenician woman, he accepted water and spoke with the Samaritan woman, and he held a Samaritan man up as the ideal of a caring person. He ate and drank and talked with and drew into his fellowship the outcasts, the despised – among them women. By going to the Outsiders Jesus demonstrated the essential truth that his flock encompassed all people, regardless of race, creed or gender.