

Gathering Prayer:

Zoom in and worship as sheep of one fold.
 Zoom in as those who are welcoming.
 Zoom in as those who are accepting;
 as those who are called and
 united by the protective love of the good shepherd.
 Zoom in and be shaped.
 Zoom in and be challenged.
 Zoom in and be changed.
 Zoom in and rejoice.
 For Christ is your rod and your staff,
 your hope and your Saviour, today and always.

**StF 571**

1 As your family, Lord, see us here,
 as your family, Lord, see us here,
 as your family, Lord, see us here,
 O Lord, see us here.

2 At your table, Lord, we are fed,
 at your table, Lord, we are fed,
 at your table, Lord, we are fed,
 O Lord, feed us here.

3 Fill our spirits, Lord, with your love,
 fill our spirits, Lord, with your love,
 fill our spirits, Lord, with your love,
 O Lord, give your love.

4 Make us faithful, Lord, to your will,
 make us faithful, Lord, to your will,
 make us faithful, Lord, to your will,
 O Lord, to your will.

5 As your family, Lord, see us here,
 as your family, Lord, see us here,
 as your family, Lord, see us here,
 O Lord, see us here.

Here in Yorkshire we probably mainly think of shepherds as being those who look after sheep in the fields around us. They may also have a few goats but not so many as was the case in biblical times. How well do you know your sheep and goats and how easily can you tell them apart. Again it's easier for us to identify the difference in Yorkshire but it was not quite so easy 2k years ago in the Middle East. The easiest way to tell the difference between a **sheep** and **goat** is to look at their **tails**. A **goat's tail** goes **up** (unless it is sick, frightened, or in distress). **Sheep tails** hang **down** and are often docked (shortened) for health and sanitary reasons

Goats don't get a good press in our scripture reading so thank goodness Jesus was referring to them symbolically. Nevertheless the interpretation is one of life and death as we shall consider further.

After all that I think it's time for **Prayer**:

Thank you Lord for the beauty of your creation in all its facets. Yours is the earth and everything in it. Made for our pleasure and also for us to exercise responsibility. In a small garden or window box, If we fail to provide care and attention, then things soon grow wild and unmanageable. Yet there is far more : the valleys, mountains, seas and spray, the land, the pastures, the trees, plants and animals. All around us we see your bounty, your exuberant goodness, your flourishing provision. You have made us to live here, nurtured by this earth and by work. We find joy in our surroundings and to be your people, living, working, resting and supporting. We thank you for the gifts of living all around us every day.

But we regret that on occasion we neglect our responsibilities:

When we have seen the broken and not been moved to compassion;
 When we have heard people mourning and not given them our time;
 When we have witnessed oppression and not raised our voices;
 When we have seen the stranger and not said a word;
 God, hiding in all strangers, all around us,
 We are truly sorry for what we have done and not done,
 And we ask you to deepen your welcome in us
 So that we might deepen our welcome around us. Amen

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

I was cold, I was naked
Were you there, were you there?
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?
And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter
Were you there?

When I needed a shelter
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a shelter were you there?
And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter
Were you there?

When I needed a healer
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a healer, were you there?
And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter
Were you there?

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

St Georges Crypt

<https://www.facebook.com/stgeorgescrypt/videos/1017027735484086>

Why another translation of the New Testament people ask? As Tom Wright points out: 'Translating the New Testament is something that each generation ought to be doing. Just as Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread, we can never simply live on yesterday's bread, on the interpretations and translations of previous generations.' Our reading then comes from The Bible for Everyone – a new translation by John Goldingay and Tom Wright.

Reading Matthew Ch 25 v 30 – 46

The Sheep and the Goats

³¹ 'When the son of man comes in his glory,' Jesus went on, 'and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be assembled in front of him, and he will separate them from one another, like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will stand the sheep at his right hand, and the goats at his left. ³⁴ 'Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come here, you people who my father has blessed. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world! ³⁵ Why? Because 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 made me welcome. ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you came to me."
³⁷ 'Then the righteous will answer him, "Master, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and come to see you?"
⁴⁰ 'Then the king will answer them, "I'm telling you the truth: when you did it to one of the least significant of my brothers and sisters here, you did it to me."
⁴¹ 'Then he will say to those on his left hand, "Get away from me! You're accursed! Go to the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! ⁴² Why? Because I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat! I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink! ⁴³ I was a stranger and you didn't welcome me; I was naked and you didn't clothe me; I was sick and in prison and you didn't look after me!"
⁴⁴ 'Then they too will answer, "Master, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't do anything for you?"
⁴⁵ 'Then he will answer them, "I'm telling you the truth: when you didn't do it for one of the least significant of my brothers and sisters here, you didn't do it for me."
⁴⁶ 'And they will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous will go into everlasting life.'

The Bible for Everyone (A new translation by John Goldingay and Tom Wright)

Talk

There are times for us all I'm sure when we fail to see the wood for the trees. An expression used of someone who is too involved in the details of a problem to look at the situation as a whole. There are many examples. It can happen in sport when a cricketer's technique for example is given so much coaching that they lose the natural ability to play the game well. In business if

the supervisor starts to do some of the work himself or herself when it's not their job, then they can easily take their eye off the focus of the business and its purpose. Sometimes earnest study of the bible can get in the way so that there is a danger we miss something simple that contains a great blessing.

Our Gospel reading this morning may well be a case in point as it majors on the story of sheep and goats. The meaning of the story is a hotly debated one. The hungry and thirsty referred to by Jesus here have been variously identified. They are in essence the poor and oppressed. But who really are the sheep and goats? Are they flocks, that is Nations, or are they individuals? After all the nations are but a gathering of the people. Is this the final judgement as the GNB heading suggests or is it ongoing guidance or both?

Jesus regularly used parables some of which left the listeners baffled, however, this parable is crystal clear. God will judge us in accordance with our reaction to human need. His judgement does not depend upon the knowledge we have amassed or the fame we have acquired or indeed the fortune we have gained, but on the help we have given.

The present state of our country and that of the rest of the world simply underlines the needs which many people have. We can give a hungry person a meal; we can give a thirsty person a drink; maybe we will find welcoming a stranger or visiting a prisoner difficult in Covid times but we can phone and use the internet to cheer the sick and lonely. As Christmas approaches, in addition to the traditional festive cards there will be many laudable charities whose letters or Emails arrive seeking financial help to undertake tasks effectively on our behalf. It's not a question of giving thousands of pounds, unless you can, but more realistically making a contribution both financially and through prayer. Doing our bit.

In the parable those who helped found giving to be natural and the action of a loving heart. They could not stop themselves. Whereas those who failed to offer help offered excuses. If we had known it was you Jesus we would gladly have helped they said. But we thought it was only some common person who was not worth helping. It remains true that there are those who will help if there is something in it for them: praise and thanks or publicity perhaps. But help like that is not generosity. The help of which God approves is that given freely simply for the sake of helping.

As God's family the help we give is given to Jesus and that withheld is withheld from Him. God is Father of all and the way we delight the heart of God is to help his children, our neighbours. So as Christmas approaches in whatever form this year, however we feel, may we harken to the guidance of Matthew's gospel in Ch 21 where Jesus asks what his listeners thought then and indeed we think today; of the story of 2 sons. How often when challenged to do something, do we react like the first son who when asked to work in the vineyard says no but then changes his mind and does. The second son does the exact opposite and says he will then doesn't. The difference between a sheep and a goat perhaps.

At first sight, the contrast seems to be between those who helped the needy and those who did not. But, chances are, we do not wholly identify with one group or the other. A more fruitful contrast to consider is in our reaction to the story. Does it leave us feeling guilty, or feeling encouraged? There is nothing new in telling us we should attend to the poor and distressed. But we can react to that command either in guilt at all we have failed to do, or with joy that even the least we do is of significance in God's kingdom.

There is so much need and suffering in our world that it's easy to feel overwhelmed and guilty. Guilt can paralyse us into doing nothing, until we say with the goats, 'But, Lord, if we'd realised it was *you* we would have done something!' The good news of the parable is that every good act we do, however small it may seem, is a significant act in the eyes of God, as precious as if it were done for Christ himself.

Very little chance of a pantomime this year but once upon a time theatregoers leaving after one performance were met by two people collecting for 'Crisis at Christmas'. One man, throwing a coin in the bucket, remarked angrily, 'That's it! I don't want anyone else asking me to give to "Charity"! It was clear he was giving out of a sense of guilt — but it gave him no pleasure. If only someone could have shared with him something of the joy of the sheep, who discovered that their small acts of kindness had ministered to Christ himself.

The difficulty of knowing how to weigh good deeds against bad directs us to a vital point: in the end our righteousness does not depend on our good deeds but on Christ. The poor certainly need our help, but it is by the grace of God that we are saved.

So let us take heed of what Jesus is saying particularly through the difficult times leading to Christmas and beyond. May Jesus say of us

"When I was hungry you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink
I was homeless and you gave me a room
I was shivering and you gave me clothes
I was sick and you stopped to visit
I was in prison and you came to me."
Amen

Intercessions:

For the times we are sick

May we have healing

For the times we are isolated

May we have company

For the times we are oppressed

May we have justice

For the times we are exposed

May we have dignity

For the times we are mistreated

May we have humanity

For the times we are ignored

May we be heard

For the times when we ignore, or isolate or oppress or expose or mistreat

May we change

Amen

Lords Prayer

StF 673

"Will you come and follow me

if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know

and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,

will you let my name be known,

will you let my life be grown

in you and you in me?

"Will you leave yourself behind

if I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind

and never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare,

should your life attract or scare?

Will you let me answer pray'r

in you and you in me?

"Will you let the blinded see

if I but call your name?

Will you set the pris'ners free

and never be the same?

Will you kiss the leper clean,

and do such as this unseen,

and admit to what I mean

in you and you in me?

Blessing:

O God of kindness

Zoom us out with more time for interruptions

And more generosity for kindness

So that we might see you

Within our walls and beyond these walls Amen

Grace

"Will you love the you you hide

if I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside

and never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found

to reshape the world around,

through my sight and touch and sound

in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true

when you but call my name.

Let me turn and follow you

and never be the same.

In your company I'll go

where your love and footsteps show.

Thus I'll move and live and grow

in you and you in me.