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*Reflection 1: The importance of loving others as Jesus did*

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When I was ordained minister of the gospel in the Church of Scotland almost 26 years ago, my congregation wanted to give me a clerical scarf to add to my robes. I accepted their gift but asked that the emblems that I had embroidered on it were of the cross and of a crown –for I depend on Christ’s costly gracious love; and in my ministry, am called to serve Christ, my Servant King. Like every other Christian, I am called to be a royal priest helping others to know Christ and His love.

Many of the kings and queens in our world do not now have a great deal of real power, but are still people who command respect. The power and the majesty of Jesus is far greater than any human monarch or ruler. Christ is in charge of everything and everyone. He is worthy of our worship and our obedience. In Matthew 25: 31-46, Jesus, still thinking of the time when He will come back in glory, reminds us that each of us is accountable to Him.

But there is something very disturbing and surprising here. Where do we see the King today? Do we see him on a throne ruling in power? Well yes, for Jesus is reigning now, but we also see Him in His people, who are often the lost, the powerless, the hungry and the imprisoned. Those locked up in prison but also all in dark despair, fear and isolation. The key to how we will be assessed when Jesus comes or we meet Him face to face is the way that we have treated others. By showing the sort of love that Jesus showed, we demonstrate that He is our King. as King, Jesus is also our Shepherd, “The Good Shepherd”, who loves and serves and protects.

Although Jesus is King now, not everyone can see this but one day, He will be universally acknowledged and recognised. We are called to make Him our King here and now and to live as He wants us to by following his example and showing love to others, especially those in need. In that reading from Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul makes clear that Christ is present in the world now - through His body, the Church. (v. 23) The challenge here is clear; the difficulty is not seeing the point but living by it. By God’s grace, may we learn to do so.

**Reflection 2: How then we should live for Jesus as we wait     Matthew 25: 31-46**

There is a dark theme running through Matthew’s gospel; he emphasises the coming judgment of God with haunting images of outer darkness and eternal fire.

Matthew’s concern was for the lapsed & back-sliders among his readers & his congregation who were wavering under pressure from strict Jews; there are repeated warnings.

At times, he is like a hell-fire preacher, dangling his audience over the pit, trying to threaten or frighten them into repentance, which is not the way to preach the gospel.

But it is important not to forget that our sin angers as well as saddens God; & without being sorted, does cut us off from God. Our current generation has lost its sense of sin, & sees little need to make recompense; God is too often regarded as an easy-going Father -or grandfather - figure, who will let us away with anything as long as we say that we are sorry.

.. Know that you and me are still accountable for our actions and our inaction.

***The King comes*** When the King does come to His throne, in His surprising Last Analysis, the question is not about religious faithfulness but about what we have done for each other.

It would be quite mistaken to suppose that this reduces Christian faith to an extension of the Scout movement: “***doing a good deed every day or showing kindness to all in need***”.

**The heart of Christianity is a relationship with God through Christ, a trusting not in what I manage to do right but in God’s love that took Jesus to the cross to suffer & die & rise again to put us right, a personal faith that also proves itself by what it does.**

**It would be equally mistaken to suppose that it is possible to help those in need without involving God; Christ is with and in every one of them and any response to them expresses and defines a relationship with Him, whether or not it is acknowledged.**

***The people’s King*** If we take a pair of very sharp scissors and cut out from the bible every reference to the poor, all that will be left will be like a piece of fragile lace. Throughout all our Scriptures, God is predisposed towards the poor, ranges Himself alongside them, and gives them a priority. From the Incarnation, the King is completely involved in the suffering of His subjects.; and the King is also a shepherd, who cares so much about the least and the last, that He is not only alongside them but identifies himself with them. – serving Him means serving them; serving them is part of serving Him.

***Justification*** In St. Paul’s great teaching about justification by faith in Romans chapters 1-5 and 8:1, the scene switches from the court room to the throne room; and the Judge does not pronounce a death sentence, but the King declares an amnesty. So with Charles Wesley and the writer to the Hebrews, we ***may boldly approach that eternal throne***, confident in what Jesus has made plain and in what He has achieved for us. Judgment is, and will be tempered with grace and mercy.

But when at the last, He catches our eye, as He caught Simon Peter’s across the courtyard, & we see the same compassion & understanding, & find forgiveness as Simon did, His first question could still begin, ***when I was hungry....***