

St John the Baptist, Catford

Ezekiel 34:11-16,20-24

Psalms 95:1-7

Ephesians 1:15-end

Matthew 25:31-end

Over the last few weeks we have heard a lot about judgment. We have been hearing in instalments Jesus's last words of teaching, after His entry into Jerusalem and before facing His Passion and death. We have heard a range of parables, explaining what judgment will look like:

the hard parable of the banquet, which all are welcomed to, but from which one guest not wearing wedding clothes is thrown into the outer darkness; the wicked slave, who beats his fellow slaves once

their master has gone; the wise and foolish virgins; and the parable of the talents.

These are strange, terrifying stories warning us to keep awake, ready for Jesus's return, and the judgment that will come with that.

Well, today, finally, we get a slightly brighter picture of what that judgment looks like.

Judgment is not just something we are told about to make us afraid, to make us do better for fear of what might happen if we don't, though it might well have that effect.

It is primarily I think about revealing things to us as they *really* are.

The word 'apocalypse' might make you think of fires and earthquakes, and of nightmarish films, but the word actually means 'revealing': so, for example, Roman Catholics call the book we call Revelation, the Apocalypse, but they mean the same thing.

And we can see that sense of judgment in this morning's gospel. In separating out the sheep from the goats, Jesus is of course acting as judge, but He is revealing things as they *really* are: He is revealing who has truly lived out their faith in Him by caring for those in need. This is not so much making a decision as to who is saved, as bringing to light what is already true; bringing God's view of the world into relief, for all to see.

Now, if Jesus isn't so much making a decision as revealing the truth, you might wonder why His

judgment is necessary. Well, that's a good question, but if we think about it, I think the answer is obvious.

If we look around us in the world, there are plenty of people who do not obviously manifest Christ's values. That is not to judge *particular* people ourselves, and certainly not to judge that we are better than others: we can't know the hearts of others, or what is to come for them, or indeed for us, between now and the moment of our death.

But we do see some who evidently *don't* care for the poor, doing very well in the world, enjoying status and comfort, even popularity. We saw it I think in the American election, as Donald Trump courted fear of the outsider, and, in my view, a lack of concern for welcoming the stranger. He may have lost the

election, but he won a previous one on that basis, and still enjoys strong support.

There are many different reasons for people's success in this world, and there are good and bad people mixed together in all places, professions and levels in the world's society.

What Jesus shows us in His vision of judgment however, is a world in which His values will be the only ones that matter; in which He is king, rather than the rulers of this world. And in which those values shine out and illuminate everything.

And this is a wondrous thing; there is *joy* in this judgment.

And it is why we pray '*Thy Kingdom come*' every day.

Now, Christ isn't described as a king that much in the gospels. He is mockingly called King of the Jews by Pilate, not long after the passages we've been hearing, but He is more often called the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God, Christ.

But His reign is one we all wait for eagerly, and one which will be different from any earthly reign.

This feast of Christ the King is a recent one, one started by Pope Pius XI in 1925, and one which has unusually been adopted by most churches since – something which I think demonstrates how much we need it.

The Pope began this feast in an age in which fascism was a growing force, in which those who promised

strength and domination were winning power across Europe. And he saw that this was a desperately anti-Christian movement. The worshipping of power and strength for their own sake is blasphemous; it is worshipping values which are the opposite of those of our faith. And they remain diametrically opposed to everything we stand for.

Perfect love casts out fear, and any politics, or views more generally, that use fear of the other; that are based on serving your own needs, or those of people like yourself or of any other limited group, whether defined by nationality, background, race or tribe, rather than those most in need is anti-Christian.

That is to dethrone Christ. And Pope Pius saw that the reign of Christ as King was being obscured by the politics of his day.

Such rulers and régimes rarely last for too long of course; the truth about them is normally revealed.

But it is also *our* calling to live up to the values of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. For in the last day His values, those that we find in the person of the God-Man whom we live for, will be revealed as the only truth and power that matter.

And all will be revealed in the light of Him.

True power lies in weakness and brokenness. God showed His power by making His Son needy, particularly of water to drink, as we see Him on the Cross, and as we encounter Him with the Samaritan woman at the well. And this, despite being the true water, with which we will never thirst.

But in becoming human, He who provides all that we need, becomes one with those in need of food; in need of water to drink; in need of welcome and love; in need of clothing; in need of a simple visit; of company; of our company.

And in responding to that need, not only is *our* faith revealed, but the reign of Christ. His power is different from earthly power, and yet it conquers it.

When you feel that tug of need from another, particularly from a stranger, it is not you acting is it? It is you being inspired by the Holy Spirit, and giving in to that power within you. Giving *in* to the power of serving another whom God has given you the gift of being able to help.

While judgment might seem to imply a battle between good and evil, that is not how it is at all. The goodness and love of God is the Truth, and is all powerful. And when we respond to it, to Him, we are simply giving in to the love of God, letting it have its rightful place in our hearts; letting Jesus sit upon our hearts to reign there.

And how does He reign? Well, He reigns in the face of those who need our help; when we feel that tug to help, to let the grace and love of Christ flow through us, He is reigning through the power of those who have no earthly power;

He is reigning through the eyes of a refugee, desperate to feed her child on the shores of the Mediterranean;

He is reigning through the look of a man sitting on the floor with his arms outstretched at London Bridge station.

And when we see Jesus's face in the face of those whom we are given the opportunity to serve, we see our real master, and we find our real treasure.

And the values of this world dissolve in that apocalypse, in that revelation. And we see the world as it truly is. As if in a vision.

And it is a glorious vision. It is a vision of the world transformed, of *need* transformed, of reconciliation and healing.

A vision of the world as it *should* be, as it *can* be, as it will be.

A vision of the world we pray for the coming of.

A world we await with eager hearts as we turn towards Advent, yearning for the coming of our King, in the form of a weak, helpless baby.

Judgment can be a terrifying thing. But only for those who do *not* respond to the over-powering love that we find in the person of Jesus Christ.

Terrifying, perhaps. But *how* could we fail to respond to this vision of Jesus's kingship which we are given, where all are loved and held by the transfixing eyes of God?

If we don't, then heaven-help us; but why would we not? And if we do respond, and fall in love again with the face of Jesus in all who need the love of God which is flowing through us, then we have *no* reason to be afraid.

Jesus, may thy kingdom come indeed. Amen