

# Leavening Church

## Thought for Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November (Steve Langton)

Our gospel reading for today continues the series from Matthew, this time talking explicitly about the judgement day when the King will 'separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats'. The full reading is [Matthew 25:31-46](#) but here is an extract:

<sup>34</sup> 'Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For 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 invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

<sup>37</sup> 'Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?"

<sup>40</sup> 'The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

The King then goes on to reprimand the 'goats' on his left for not helping the needy and condemns them to the 'eternal fire'. Clearly this is a passage that raises major theological issues about judgement, and about the roles of faith and works in salvation. However, I will leave these for another day and instead deal with a couple of practical implications of this powerful instruction to help those in need.

Firstly, note that the 'sheep on the right' didn't even realise that they had helped the King. They are not being rewarded for some great act of generosity that they had undertaken to gain favour with the King. Instead they are rewarded for all those small acts of generosity in their everyday lives. In our own lives this means responding when we see hunger or suffering around us – acting like the good Samaritan, not the priest or the Levite who walked on without helping. It means supporting our friends and relatives when they are in need or distress, not being very British and deciding it is best not to interfere. And in an interconnected world it means responding to the images of disease and suffering elsewhere in the world that we see so often on our TV screens.

This brings me on to a more controversial point. As Christians I think we should try to ensure that our country also responds to the world's suffering people in the same way that we do as individuals. Our country mainly achieves this through its foreign aid budget, which has a proven success record in delivering health and education to poor communities in less wealthy countries. Since 1970 the UN has had a target that rich countries should give away 0.7% of GDP in foreign aid. Britain's churches were at the forefront of the campaign to meet this target, but little progress was made until 1997. Tony Blair's Labour government then implemented big increases in foreign aid, and the target was finally achieved under the Conservative government of David Cameron, who also made the commitment legally binding.

There are now strong rumours that our country will reduce the aid budget in an attempt to balance the books after Covid. If you believe that this would be a retrograde step please lobby your MP about it.