

Sermon – Christ the King - St James St Johns All Saints

Matt 25:31-End

22 Nov 2020



If you've ever been to London and visited St Paul's Cathedral, you've might not have realised but you

were very close to the Old Bailey, where there stands a statue of the God of Justice. She is blindfolded, to illustrate impartiality, and carries a sword in one hand and the scales of justice in the other. She is the epitome of human justice, the best that we can expect here on Earth. Our Bible reading today is also about justice and judgement. It can make uncomfortable reading because judgment is not a subject which Christians like to talk about. It appears inconsistent with God's unconditional love. Preaching on Judgement is also out of fashion; we prefer to think of 'social justice' and of God working through ways of gentle persuasion. However, like last week, when we seek to understand what Jesus is truly saying, it illuminates our faith and equips us to engage with the world around us. Judgement is something that our faith teaches us to be familiar with: we say 'He shall come again in glory to judge both living and dead' in our Creed; our Matins *Te Deum* contains the words 'we believe that thou shalt come to be our judge', and we sing hymns which eagerly await Christ's return.

Which parent could fail to have empathy for the parents of Madeleine McCann, the young girl taken whilst on holiday in

Portugal in 2007. Whilst we don't like to talk about judgement, we do find in ourselves an aching for judgement, especially when it seems earthly justice is incomplete. There is a sense that some things are not fully resolved in our lifetime, especially when the magnitude of some crime are so great. The author Fleming Rutledge puts it like this: '*Judgement is the unconditional love of God manifested against anything that would frustrate or destroy the designs of his love. To use an environmental analogy, 'if a poisonous contamination had been released into the air and water, it must be permanently eliminated in order for God's new creation to breathe and have eternal life'*'. That poisonous contaminant has an old-fashioned name, sin. The Bible tells us that '*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*' (Rom 3:23) – it's tough to hear but if we're honest with ourselves we know we have all said and done things which have affected others. Words which wounded; relationships damaged by actions, envy and jealousy and greed. The offense against Madeleine McCann was also an offence against her parents, who continue to bear the pain and suffering any parent would feel at losing their daughter or son. So God suffers when our wrongdoing affects other people, because he is the Father of us all. But does God have the right to judge us?

'At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly—not with cringing shame, but with belligerence. "Can God judge us? How can he know about suffering?" snapped a young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed

number from a Nazi concentration camp. “We endured terror... beatings... torture... death!” In another group a young man lowered his collar. “What about this?” he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. “Lynched... for no crime but being black!” In another crowd, a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes. “Why should I suffer?” she murmured. “It wasn’t my fault.” Far out across the plain there were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he permitted in his world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that man had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said. So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew, a young black man, a person from Hiroshima, a deformed arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the centre of the plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever. Before God could be qualified to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth—as a man! “Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind when he tries to do it. Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him be tortured and abused.” “At the last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die. Let him die so that there can be no doubt that he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.” As each leader announced his portion of

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*the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled. And when the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered another word. No one moved. For suddenly all knew that God had already served his sentence.’ (From *The Long Silence*, Anon)*

The good news is that God in Jesus Christ has served our sentence, paid the full cost of our wrongdoings and the wrongs done against us. He did this when he took upon himself the judgment which was rightfully due to each one of us. He did this to redeem the world, to ransom us from a future without love. He is the true God of Justice and true God of Love. This is the God we worship; this is the God whose justice and love will ultimately set the world to rights, once and for all. He is the Christ the King, whose arrival we look forward to during the coming season of Advent. CS Lewis captures this beautifully in his Christmas book, the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe:

*‘Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death,
When he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again.’*

