

## When did I see you hungry?

David Fotheringham, 15 November 2020

High Street Uniting Church Frankston

**Bible reading:** Matthew 25: 31-46

*Faithful God, whose word is life: come with saving power to free our praise, inspire our prayer and shape our lives for the kingdom of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The Mount of Olives is a beautiful spot, just opposite the temple in Jerusalem on the other side of a valley. I say beautiful – and it is – but it's also a little unusual in that there are thousands and thousands of graves, because right from Old Testament times there had been prophecies about the Mount of Olives being the place where the Lord would appear and from which he would enter Jerusalem on the great and glorious Day of the Lord. There are lots of stories and embellishments on that theme. And lots of people are buried there in the hope of having a box-seat view, so to speak, when the Day of the Lord arrives. As you would expect from the name, there are also a good number of olive trees.

I mention the Mount of Olives because that is where Jesus is sitting when he is telling this story, shortly before celebrating the last supper with his disciples and all of the subsequent events of Easter. It's a pretty deliberate location for the story. In that place, the Mount of Olives itself, Jesus tells this story depicting the coming of the Son of Man, the arrival of the King for the Day of Judgement and the full establishment of God's Kingdom. It's also a deliberate time for the story, coming just before the Passover during which Jesus will be judged and crucified.

I want to invite you to reflect on this from an angle that you might not expect. I want to invite you to reflect from the perspective of the disciples, there on the mountain listening to Jesus, as Jesus paints a scene of the King separating people from all the nations like a shepherd separating the sheep and the goats. Jesus says that the people from all the nations will be judged according to their treatment of the little ones, the least of my family.

Elsewhere in Matthew it is the disciples themselves whom Jesus refers to as the little ones.

So when Jesus is talking to the disciples about the judgement day, he offering a reassurance, in a sense. His disciples can expect that in this path of sacrificial and inclusive love, they may find themselves hungry, naked, sick, or in prison. Reading the letters of Paul the apostle you can see that this is realistic; or reading Foxes' book of martyrs, or hearing the stories of Christians in many places even today. Jesus tells his disciples – tells us - that on the Judgement Day, he's on their side; indeed, he will have been with them. And those from any nation who gave them food or drink or clothing or care will be rewarded.

Of course the disciples *will* go out among the nations. Jesus is with them – with us – when we present ourselves in humility. And people’s reactions will not go unnoticed or unrewarded.

Reflecting on this story from this angle may incline us to think differently about how we present ourselves, and what our expectations are as followers of Christ, who may not always be fed or free, but will always have God with us, Emmanuel – a key theme in Matthew’s gospel, its first word and its last.

Jesus, of course, embodies his own teaching, trusting God and living simply; and also living out the same sort of care for others that is described in this story.

He who identifies with the least of his little ones, who says “when you did it to the least of my these in my family, you did it to me”, and who himself, a few verses later in Matthew, is preparing to be handed over to be crucified through the judgement of the world and for our sake, is the ultimate King and Judge.

Sometimes we wonder about questions of Salvation: what happens to the people who never even knew Jesus? There’s something of an answer here, in terms of how people from all the nations have responded to Jesus in the face of his little ones. Not his “big ones”, I notice, not the “big shot Christians”, but his little ones who offer the gospel with humility and sacrifice and grace, loving God and loving their neighbour as themselves.

I wonder where we are in this story?

Of course, there are many significant and noticeable ways in which we support and care for others in the kinds of ways that are described in this story. There have been phone calls to people in lockdown. Support for people like Tom Sutherland has continued, and for other projects in India and East Timor. And the Wednesday BBQ is re-starting, and a Soup Kitchen, and plans are underway for the Hamper Packing at the church in December – for which, by the way, there will be much tighter arrangements about how many people can be involved. These sorts of things are very much signs of the Kingdom; they are valued in the sight of God.

I wonder if we see ourselves as Jesus’ little ones, as the least of his family – you might want to reflect on what that feels like; and whether your life and witness has been met with kindness and mercy from other people in response. Or whether you have been met with refusal and isolation.

We might also ask ourselves whether there are disciples – or anyone – whom we have refused or left isolated; and whether this story prompts us to wonder about when we might have served – or not served – Jesus among the little ones.

Let us pray. God, help us in our reflections on what it is to be one of Jesus’ little ones, one of his disciples; and how we love and serve even in the humblest of actions.