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Christ The King

By Joy Dipple

Ephesians 1: 15-23

Matthew 24: 31-36

A couple of weeks ago I was walking up to Tettenhall Wood from Compton at the end of the afternoon, and I realised what an analogy the walk was with the situation we are in at the moment. The walk up the Holloway was a breathless struggle which reminded me of the struggles people had in the first lockdown – their fears for themselves and loved ones, and also the isolation. Christians know that Christ is still with them behind the locked doors of that isolation, but on one occasion I had thought how nice it would be to actually see him. The thought then came to me that I couldn't see him anyway because he is actually closer than next to me. For believers Christ dwells within us through The Holy Spirit. He is closer than next to us, and I hope that thought is also a comfort for you as well.

When I reached Ormes Lane I turned the corner and started the next climb upwards, the second hill, the second lockdown. I had to get off the footpath in a few places because of the purple barriers where the new fibre optic cables were being laid. On my later descent I still had to negotiate those barriers – a reminder that our paths in life aren't always straight forward. There are often things that get in the way, and that has certainly been the case this year; but the descent down the hill was certainly less strenuous, and to add to that the view in the distance of a pink sunset and distant hills was quite spectacular. It made me think that we have to keep an eye on the distant view, the bigger picture, the expanse of eternity. It makes our Christian walk a whole lot easier.

Our first reading from Ephesians gives us that bigger picture that we need to hang on to. This week has, as its theme, Christ as King, and we certainly see that kingship role beautifully described in this passage. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly realm, having absolute authority over the world. He is the head of the body of the church.

Christ judges the world from His throne and that is depicted in Matthew's gospel in the story of the separation of the sheep and goats. Christ is seen within those in need, and people are judged according to their response to that need. To minister is to minister to Christ. During our present pandemic that ministry has been very evident in all those who help others: the NHS staff, the vaccine producers that we are especially grateful for, social care staff, teachers, those who shop for others etc. Of course we have also seen the opposite reaction too – in those who flout the rules. My own personal initial response to this passage was 'ouch!' I'm not a particularly practical person; and really admire those who have those skills e.g. baking cakes to give to others. My own idea of hell would be to have to make a cake on Bake Off!

At first glance being judged on how we ourselves minister to others seems to be the main subject of this passage. BUT I have a huge problem with that. It really

comes across as a story of the last judgement where judgement is made according to works. Those of us who have ministered well are weighed on the righteous side of the scales; but I have to ask the question: 'What about the Grace of God?' – the fact that God has given us righteousness as a free gift of His grace, so that our faith is not dependent on good works, but good works are a result of our faith instead.

We have already seen that since His ascension Christ is already seated on His throne, governing the world from the heavenly realm with his church as his hands and feet, and seeing how his church is treated. People are judged according to whether they accept Him as King and Lord of their lives. As we saw in the letter to the Ephesians those who accept Christ have already become holy people, part of God's family in His kingdom. In one sense the judgement described in Matthew's gospel is already taking place from the throne of Christ.

There are a number of interpretations of this passage in Matthew, but it is generally thought that there will still be a final judgement when Christ comes with his church to judge the nations. One view is that at that point it is the unbelievers both past and present who will be judged according to their works, a judgement that no longer applies to those who are already part of The Kingdom.

We have only heard part of this story today, but further on in the passage Jesus says, 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Jesus was about to experience death on the Cross, and his followers were going to endure great persecution, a persecution that still continues horrifically in many parts of the world today. Tom Wright in his commentary on this passage suggests that the judgement is about how unbelievers treat God's own people. I have already said that for us who believe, Christ is so close to us that He is within us through The Holy Spirit. When Christians are treated badly there is a real sense in which Christ Himself is being treated badly too. Conversely, if anyone does anything for a Christian, they are also doing it for Christ. The 'Women Together' group in Wolverhampton has people of many faiths within it and I would say that all are exercising Christ's heart to one another whether they know it or not.

Like the sunset and the hills that I could see in the distance on my walk, we always need to look at the bigger picture of the truth in eternity – the Kingship of Christ as described in the letter to the Ephesians. We need to look at the big picture of God's grace because grace is the driving force of righteousness. The grace of God was costly on God's part, but Christ's death on the Cross gave us the path to righteousness. As Christians we may not be judged according to our actions but it is by our deeds that we are known. The more we look at the big picture of God's grace the more capable we are in ministering to others as a result of our own faith in our Lord and King. We love because we are loved. We forgive because we are forgiven. We care because God cares for us; and there is the power of The Holy Spirit within us to help us, the same power 'as the mighty strength God exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms.'