

When I was in my early teens I encountered for the first time Christian rock musicians. Shortly after his death in a plane crash in 1982 I remember being given to listen a cassette tape of Keith Green. Keith Green was a young evangelist and musician – and an outstanding pianist. There are two songs of his that I still hear in my head from time to time – Oh Lord your beautiful – and the sheep and the goats.

The sheep and goats is a retelling of the Gospel story we just heard with a piano accompaniment to gives an urgency to the telling of the story. It was so powerful in its telling that every time I hear today's gospel I am transported back. It was a song and a story which dramatically impacted on my life.

In the Keith Green retelling – the first half of the story the sheep is so disbelieving that they have ever helped God – ‘

Lord, when were you thirsty? I can't remember. And we gave you drink? Huh, when were you naked lord, and we clothed you?

And lord, when were you a stranger and we invited you in? I mean, we invited lots of people in lord. I could never forget that face.

Then God says Enough¹ In as much as you did it to the least of my bretheren, you've done it unto me.

The second part of the story is much more arrogant I guess – arguing with God that they had never seen God

*I was a stranger, and I knocked at your door,
But you didn't open, you told me to go away,
I was sick, racked in pain upon my bed,
And I begged, and prayed, and pleaded that you'd come, but you didn't, I was in prison, and
I rotted there,
I'd prayed that you'd come. I heard your programs on the radio, I read your magazines, but
you never came. Depart from me!*

Lord, there must be some mistake, when?

Lord, I mean, when were you hungry lord and we didn't give you something to eat?

*And lord, when were you thirsty, and we didn't give you drink? I mean, that's not fair, well,
would you like something now?²*

¹

https://play.google.com/music/preview/Tw3g7bvphaqodx7cbetjeipa2na?lyrics=1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=lyrics&pcampaignid=kp-lyrics&u=0#

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBkNzb283-U>

Would one of the angels like to go out and get the lord a hamburger and a coke?
Oh, you're not hungry, yeah, I lost my appetite too.

Uh lord uh, lord, when were you naked,
I mean lord, that's not fair either lord,
We didn't know what size you wear.
Oh lord, when were you a stranger lord,
You weren't one of those creepy people who used to come to the door, were you?

Then God shout's enough!

The song concludes - *And my friends, the only difference between the sheep and the goats, According to this scripture, Is what they did, and didn't do!!*

What do we do? What didn't we do?

They are powerful questions to a teenager trying to understand their place in the world. They are equally powerful questions to us as adults.

Last week we talked quite a lot in the sermon about how we imagine God wants to interact with us.³ What is the baggage we place on God which gets in the way of us just believing and therefore being faithful to God. Sometimes, like the caricature in the song we spend so much time writing and reading and arguing about God that we forget to notice God in our midst. Or we are so busy – so full of how we think God will appear to us – we don't even notice God is already here.

I suggested that Kingdom season and advent might be a time when we should think about the baggage we place on God, the unrealistic expectations maybe we have of our faith, or even ourselves.

We wondered what image of God we have, and if that image limits not only our faith – but our ability to respond to God's call. Similarly – how does our image of God enliven us – inspire us – help us to move forward and be all that God has created us to see.

So much of what we see – whether with our eyes, or our hearts or even our knowledge informs how we understand ourselves and who God is – and it can often be distorted by other things that are going on around us. As we prepare for Advent maybe we should consider the image of 'God with us' that informs our faith. Maybe for us this year Advent might be a time when we assess our assumptions about God, and dare to see our faith anew. The only difference between sheep and goats *Is what they did, and didn't do!!*

³ <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/11/pentecost-24-a-wysiwig/>

Often what we do and what we don't do – have the same potential to damage our relationships, with others and with God.

While the parable we hear today is about the end times – or is how Matthew and the early churches understand how they would be judged when Jesus returned – I think it is equally a message for us not just about judgement but about what informs the way that we live – the way that work – the way that we honour God.

Today is the final Sunday of the Church year – it is a time to give thanks for all that has taken place since Advent last year – but it is also a time to reflect on what has happened and to take stock of our faith.

At one level faith is easy for us – while some may laugh or even criticise – that we are Christian for the most part our lives are safe and it is a not a burden to our survival. Equally for the most part we live comfortable lives – while we experience pain and grief and disappointment – and for some of us each day is a struggle - for the most part in our community we do not have to rely on God to make it through each day.

This creates a danger for us – a danger that we take for granted God's blessing and comfort. That we take for granted that God is always there; and it is often when we take things for granted that we fail to realise what needs to be done, and what is left undone!

This is also another danger – that in our righteous indignation for different causes or projects that we feel we have already met Jesus and responded and so we don't see when Jesus comes in a new form. We are a very active congregation both collectively and individually in the causes and projects we give to in time and financially – this is a good thing. But one of the things which always hits me in the Keith Green version of this story is that it was those who thought that they were already serving and responding to God who actually missed the point – the ones who missed Jesus when he needed them most.

This doesn't mean we should stop anything we are doing – but it does mean when we are given moments to stop and reflect we should take them. Christ the King is one of those Sunday's which invites us to take stock – to consider who we understand God to be – but most importantly to listen to what God is saying to us, and asking us to do – and to have our eyes open to where God needs us in our midst. The difference between what we did and didn't do this year.

As many of you know I am a fan of Australian poet and cartoonist – Leunig. One of his cartoons is of Mr Curly standing at a crossroad in a desert landscape – there are two signs pointing in not quite opposite directions one reads 'who you are' the other 'who you should be'.

We have had a good year together – we have seen each other in new ways – we encountered God in different places and contexts. We have shared in raising funds

for different projects, in working together to support vulnerable members of this community. We have many things we can be proud of – this is who we are.

The question for us today is who does God now want us to be? Is it more of the same? Are there other things we need to do? Are there other things we need to see? Are there times when God is with us, or seeking our help and we do not notice?

What image of God do we have, and does that image limit not only our faith – but our ability to respond to God’s call. Similarly – how does our image of God enliven us – inspire us – help us to move forward and be all that God has created us to see.

How do we embrace the path to God which today is the image of Christ who is the King of peace?

Maybe Leunig can help us with this...

THE PATH TO YOUR DOOR by Leunig⁴

The path to your door
Is the path within,
Is made by animals,
Is lined by thorns,
Is stained with wine,
Is lit by the lamp of sorrowful dreams,
Is washed with joy,
Is swept by grief,
Is blessed by the lonely traffic of art,
Is known by heart,
Is known by prayer,
Is lost and found,
Is always strange,
The path to your door.

⁴ <http://www.leunig.com.au/works/poems>