

How not to behave

Lisa Tulfer *reflects on* Ezekiel 34:11-16. 20-24 and Matthew 25:31-end



Typically, sheep are characterised as biddable, whereas goats are wilful and stubborn. When sheep behave like goats, as in today's reading from Ezekiel, they incur censure. And Matthew's Gospel makes it clear that sheep and goats, in this allegory, are defined by their behaviour rather than whether they are, for example, Jews or Gentiles. The "sheep" are those who serve Christ in "the least of these" – the stranger, the person who is hungry, thirsty or naked. The "goats" are those who do not. And just as when the scapegoat is sent out into the desert during the festival of Yom Kippur, these "goats" will be banished from the presence of God.

the goats have actively sinned, but their sin lies in their failure to serve those in need and thereby they have failed to serve Christ. Those whom the Son of Man blesses in this Gospel reading are blessed not for their faith, nor for acknowledging Christ the King, nor for diligence in prayer. Their blessedness lies in their behaviour, specifically in the way they treat those who are the weakest and most marginalised in society.

On this, the last Sunday of the Church's year, we rejoice in Christ the King, ruler and judge of all, who sits upon the throne of his glory, judging his people according to their actions towards those who are humblest and lowest in his kingdom. We long to inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. 🍷

The sheep and goats in this passage are categorised simply by their behaviour. It is not that

Lord, when we see you hungry, thirsty, a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, give us the resources and courage to take care of you. Amen.

A brief history of Anglican liturgy

Common Worship

by Heather Smith

The millennium saw a revision to the Church of England liturgy that would replace the 1980 *Alternative Service Book*. *Common Worship* was introduced in 2000. It contains an array of choice, with the result that in many churches a whole raft of different service booklets exists to cover the different times and

seasons. The liturgy for a Eucharist in Ordinary Time in one church may seem quite different from that of the church a few miles away. Although they follow the same framework, the choices made can result in huge differences in the words actually spoken.

The experience of worship is certainly different from that which early twentieth-century congregations would have had. *BCP* is, of course, still the only permanently authorised service book, so in terms of the newer liturgy, the future may bring further developments, as liturgical scholars continue to study the liturgy of the early Church and consider the needs of an ever-changing society. 🍷

“The problem is not feeding the poor, clothing the naked and visiting the sick, but rather recognising that the poor, the naked, the sick, the prisoners and the homeless have the dignity to sit at our table, to feel 'at home' among us, to feel part of a family. This is the sign that the kingdom of heaven is in our midst.”

Pope Francis in Chile, 16 January 2018

The end of the year - part IV

by Ricarda Witcombe

Today is the last Sunday of the church year, and our focus is on celebrating and remembering that Christ is King. He holds absolutely everything, including us, in his hands. Arthur Balfour, who was British Prime Minister from 1902 until 1905, said, "Nothing matters very much, and few things matter at all."

The truth that Christ is king is one of those few things that do matter: it gives us hope, not just for us but for the whole universe. Whatever has been, and whatever is to come, Christ will continue to be king and will continue to hold us, and to lead us safely through the rest of our lives.

In light of this, take some time today to ponder what are the few things that truly matter in your life, and pray for the grace to hold those things close as we end this year and travel together into a new one. 🍷