



# **March Team Ministry**

**March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda**

*Welcome*

***Last Sunday in the Kingdom Season***

***November 22nd 2020***

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at [andrew.marchurch@gmail.com](mailto:andrew.marchurch@gmail.com)

**Church Services (apart from Funerals) are suspended for the current lockdown. We still have our zoom services, e-newsletters and leaflet deliveries.**  
Please also access the many options on line for worship and prayer.

**"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."**

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## ***Prayers for this Week***

Almighty God, you have conferred upon Christ Jesus sovereignty over every age and nation. Direct us, in the love of Christ to care for the least of his brothers and sisters, that we may be subject to his dominion and receive the inheritance of your kingdom. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

Destitute king, one with the hungry, the naked and the scorned: may our faith be proved not in dogma or piety but in serving you in the last and the least; through Jesus Christ, the stranger's Lord.

**Amen.**

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## Reading ~ Matthew 25: 31-46

*Jesus said to his disciples, 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'*

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### Meditation

We have today the last of the three parables that make up Matthew chapter 25; sheep and goats. It seems to be a parable about contrasting what you believe, against how you live your life. There are the obvious points that this parable makes which I do not want you to think I wish either to ignore or disguise. I could develop this meditation down any of these lines.

- middle eastern agriculture had flocks of mixed sheep and goats and they are hard to tell apart.
- salvation is offered on the basis of what you do, not what you believe.
- the illustrations of good works are about how the needs of the most disadvantaged are met; food, drink, warmth, company or companionship.
- strangers, the deprived, the lonely and prisoners are those who are members of the Lord's family.
- neither the sheep or the goats recognise the Son of Man, both are equally surprised when the Son of Man identifies himself to them.

All these make very important, and indeed challenging points, but I want to start in a slightly different place.

One of the silver linings to the storm clouds of this covid outbreak and lockdown is I have had more time to read. I tend to like to read several books at a time, different types of books at different times of the day. In normal times I often only get to read at bedtime; this luxury of reading several books being more of a holiday experience. One slot is after breakfast when I like to read something inspirational and thought provoking, very often from one of the books of sermons or meditations, written by stimulating people, that I have acquired over the years. And it will not surprise you to know that often the content of these meditations or Windows articles come from a vague memory of something I have read, but it is rare for me to be able to actually remember which inspires which and so to be able to give exact quotes.

This week I have been reading some of Rowan Williams sermons from "Illuminaries; 20 lives that illuminate the Christian way". Earlier this week I read Rowan preaching "**a reflection on the interweaving of politics, art, and worship as three ways in which human beings transform the world they are in. Politics, which seeks to transform the relationships between people and between social groups; art which seeks to transform the material stuff of this world; and worship, in which human beings invite God to transform the entire environment in which they live – inner and outer. And Bulgakov\* insists that each of these dries and withers without the others. A politics that's only politics ends up in managerial tyranny or worse. Art for art's sake leaves you with a lot of highly cultivated dilettantes who never really make a difference to anything. Worship without politics and art isolates the vital presence of the body of Christ in the midst of the world, from the concerns of human beings.**

**But bring them all together and you understand what the Church is: the Church, the community of the new creation, the new reality in which the political, the creative and the devotional/spiritual are absolutely fused together so that there is something utterly new.”**

*\*\* Sergei Bulgakov 1871-1944; a Russian orthodox theologian who was a Marxist intellectual and Christian Socialist MP. He was ordained in 1917 and fled, after the Revolution, to Paris for the rest of his life.*

Having read this, and today's gospel, I recalled two other quotations (I cannot remember who to attribute them to);

- *If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.*
- *If I give a man food, they call me a saint; if I ask why he is hungry, they call me a communist.*

At face value, or first impressions, today's parable is about what individuals do; individual sheep who have visited, fed or comforted are welcomed although they did not recognise who they served, and individual goats who are sent away because they did not act. But the shepherd separates not individual animals, but rather the two flocks. Whether you are on the left or right hands depends on the actions of your flock, tribe or community. Hence this is a political parable, for as Rowan has Bulgakov, **“Politics, which seeks to transform the relationships between people and between social groups”**. So thank God we have food banks and Chat-Tea, but why were they unknown or unnecessary only 15 years ago? Why is there this debate about free school meals in the holidays? Why are the UK's rehabilitation rates for prisoners amongst the lowest in Europe? Why do we access so much clothing that has been produced under sweat-shop conditions? Why do we have to increase our defence budget against cyber and extremist violence?

What does our gospel, and my two quotations, say to these questions and challenges? And, Rowan's sermon too, which points not only to politics and our actions as a community, but also to art and to worship. What art is being produced by sheep, or by goats, and can we recognise it? or perhaps a better question is; how do we respond to it to transform the material stuff of the world? And what of our worship? What does sheep worshipping look and sound and feel like? And what of goats likewise? How can our worship transform our inner and outer environment? and connect with politics and art for a new creation where we do not succumb to managerial tyranny or cultivated dilettantism, but rather are the Body of Christ.

(Suggest you re-read Rowan's quotation above now).

**How do we transform the lives of those in need?**

**Does it matter whether we are recognized or not as the Church?**

**Where do we recognize the Son of Man?**

**How do we influence the flock whilst remaining in the flock?**

**What do you think of the connection between politics, art and worship?**

**God bless, Andrew**

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### **Prayers**

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, always and everywhere to give you thanks, holy Father, almighty and eternal God. For with the oil of gladness you anointed Christ the Lord, your only Son, to be our great high priest and king of all creation. As priest, he offered himself once for all upon the altar of the cross and redeemed the human race by this perfect sacrifice of peace. As king he claims dominion over all your creatures, that he may bring before your infinite majesty a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace.

So, let us with confidence present our prayers and supplications to the throne of grace.

Loving God, you have taught us that the power of the heart is greater than the power of wealth and might. Hear us as we pray for the fulfilment of your reign.

We pray for all those in positions of power, that they may govern with wisdom and integrity, serving the needs of their people.

***May your reign come.***

We pray for your Church, the sign of your reign, that it may extend your welcome to people of every race and background.

***May your kingdom come.***

We pray for Christians of every denomination, that together we may come to understand the royal priesthood you bestowed on us in baptism.

***May your dominion come.***

We pray for those whose commitment to truth brings them into conflict with earthly powers, that they may have the courage to endure.

***May your rule come.***

We pray for our communities of faith that attentive to your word we may always worship in spirit and in truth.

***May your reign come.***

Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by you be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.