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Dear Friends

Christ the King

Today is one of the most important days for us as followers of Christ; it is the day when we celebrate Christ as King. But, with everything that we have had to contend with this year and our thoughts already on Christmas, it would be easy to overlook its significance.



We have reached the end of the liturgical year, which is sometimes a good point to take stock of many things in our life. As we approach Christmas we are inundated with requests to give to various charities. I never buy Christmas cards (letting you know in advance!); instead I donate the funds I would have spent to a charity, preferably one of the less well known ones, and I trust this will be used well. People give regularly to charities for different reasons, normally it's something they feel passionate about or one which has touched their lives. For me, I give to the National Autistic Society and the homeless; maybe you give to others such as Alzheimer's Society, The British Heart Foundation or Cancer Research? All these fall in the top ten receivers in the UK.

Some people check how the charity uses their funds, which is sensible of course and, if they are not convinced their money is going to be well spent or spent on what they think it should be, they don't give. This means that some charities never get a look in. We all have to decide what's a worthy cause, and sometimes we judge well and other times we don't, but a need is a need, right? It's such a difficult call to make.

There is a lot of talk about funds in churches at the moment and how these are to be shared, which is a bit of a sticking point at times. But that which we have been given to us freely in the first instance. Without our love and support for those who have less and sharing it equally, how can we be people of the gospel?

I have started talking about money probably because that is the society in which we live. Money is important, of course it is, but it only says something about us when it comes to spending or giving it. There's a lot more to being generous than money – generosity is about our trying to become followers who are generous in spirit, and our King, who we are called to follow, shows us how; a King who gave himself so we may live.

In our readings today we see our King described as a shepherd, one who is caring and compassionate towards us. In the first reading from Ezekiel we see a gentle King who is attentive and spends time looking after his sheep, he goes to great lengths to bring the one lost sheep back into the fold, he is reaching out to the weak in order to make them strong. Here we see Jesus caring for his own, just as we may care for a neighbouring church that needs our help. As Jesus looks out for us and cares for each one of us, so we in turn care for each other. This is about nurturing the generosity of spirit which Jesus shows us, where justice for God is based on equitable sharing and ensuring there is access to the things needed to live, so all can live life to its fullest. Doing nothing with what we have been given or keeping hold of it just in case isn't really an option if we want to have this same generosity of spirit.



This generosity of spirit is also mirrored in our gospel reading. Again, we see our King as a shepherd and, yes, there is an element of judgment going on (seen in our Kingdom readings) but let's not get too focused on that for now. Here we see two types of people, the sheep and the goats; notice that it is Jesus who distinguishes between them. The sheep are identified as those who have lived by Jesus' example but they cannot remember when or how they did this. Could this be because they had an inner generosity of spirit? And the goats? Well, maybe they just failed to recognise the needs of their neighbours, their fellow brothers and sisters? I know how this feels – I do this frequently. Ok, let's consider the judgment here, there's no mention of laws, it's more about doing nothing with what they have.

If we want to be counted as sheep we need to nurture this inner generosity of spirit and we can do this by being actively loving towards our neighbours. It doesn't matter why or how people's needs have come about, whether they have messed up, because these are the ones most in need and it is the lives of those in need that we are called to serve.

This is the King that we follow. This is not easy, because it's about challenging our mindset and sometimes we have to act in ways that feel like we are taking a risk. This generosity of spirit is about what happens on the inside, it's about our attitude and sometimes we have to let go of the things we think should happen.

I know you are aware that the gospel isn't about an unknown time in the future, it is about what we do with the time we have been given and, on this day when we celebrate Christ as King, I give thanks to all of you and celebrate the generosity of spirit that I see working in our communities – how you reach out to those who need support and help without even recognising you do it. How we respond to each other here and now is a reflection of how we respond to our King. When we open our hearts and our eyes we see Christ the King in those we meet, those around us, those in need, and we respond with that same generosity of spirit.



Yours in Christ

Belinda

On behalf of Simon and myself I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your cards and well wishes on our recent Engagement.