

Sermon

26 October 2014

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Text: Matthew 25:31-46

Rich Grimes tells the story, that one day while walking with some children, Queen Mary was caught in a sudden rain shower. Quickly taking shelter on the porch of a home, she knocked on the door and asked if she could borrow an umbrella. “I’ll send it back tomorrow,” she said. The queen had deliberately disguised her appearance by putting on a hat that partly covered her face and by wearing some very plain clothes. The homeowner, reluctant to give a stranger her best broly, offered her a castoff she found in the loft. One rib was broken and there were several holes in it. Apologizing, she turned it over to the monarch, whom she did not recognize.

The next day she had another visitor – a man with gold braid on his uniform and an envelope in his hand. “The queen sent me with this letter,” he said, “and also asked me to thank you personally for the loan of your umbrella.” Stunned, the woman burst into tears. “Oh, what an opportunity I missed!” she cried. “If only I knew it was the queen, I would have given her my best...”

And it’s easy to sit here and think: “Shame on her for doing that!”, but are we not all a little like that? Do we treat all people the same,

regardless of who they are? Do we respect everybody we meet and use every single opportunity we get to make a difference in other people's lives? Do we? Or are we a little less bothered about some people, ordinary people, than we are with well-known or important people?

Shocking as that may sound: That woman could have just as well been any one of us, couldn't she?

That is exactly what our Scripture reading was all about. This is probably one of the most straight forward parables in the whole of the New Testament. No ambiguity, no having to read between the lines.

Jesus is thanking his followers for giving him something to eat when he was hungry, for giving him something to drink when he was thirsty, for inviting him in when he was a stranger, for clothing him when he needed clothes, for looking after him when he was unwell and for visiting him when he was in prison.

Their reaction to this statement of Jesus was shock, because they never did any of these things for Jesus. And then Jesus replied that whatever they did for one of the least of his brothers or sisters, they did for him.

So these people were doing good to others, not in order to be rewarded for it, but because they wanted to. And in the end, they now found out, they *would be* rewarded for it!

Where the other people, who might have been doing good too, but for the wrong reasons, well, they were not that well off now. Because if you only help others to be seen, or only try to make a difference to make an

impression on others, or only give to get rid of your guilty conscience, that's just not good enough.

For Jesus it's all about what's going on in your heart. Because if you really, truly, believe in him, you will *want* to love the rest of the world in the same way he does, you will want to make a difference – even there where it won't be seen, where nobody is going to broadcast what a wonderful person you are.

But the thing we sometimes forget, is that *God* sees everything...

God doesn't want us to give to charities because we feel guilty, or to try and find a wee gap in our busy schedules to do a good deed. He wants our whole lifestyles to reflect his love. He wants this attitude of giving to be a part of who we *are*, not just something else we have to *do*.

And he doesn't expect us to change the world; it's the easy and simple tasks, the wee things that make a huge impression on him. Because you don't need a special qualification to feed somebody who's hungry, or enormous strength to be kind to a stranger, or specific talents to be there for someone who needs you.

God doesn't expect more of us than what we can do in any case. He just wants us to *do* it!

Not in order to be rewarded for it one day, but because we want to. Because nobody who understands how deeply God loves us, can just ignore it and not love him back.

It's not the good deeds we do that make us Christians. It's our faith. Christians *are* often recognised by the deeds they do, but the good deeds we do are the fruit of our salvation, not the root. The root of our salvation is our faith in God. So it's not the good deeds that make you a Christian, but these deeds will be the flower of your faith.

In other words: If you believe in God, it will show. Let's make sure it always does, and not only when it suits us.

I read a story about a young boy in the ghetto who was being teased by someone who said, "If God loves you, why doesn't He take care of you? Why doesn't God tell someone to bring you shoes and a warm coat and better food?" The young boy thought for a moment, and then with tears starting in his eyes, said, "I guess He does tell somebody, but somebody forgets."

God places individuals on our paths for a reason. He has chosen *us* to be the answer to much of the suffering that takes place all around us.

The Blythswood Care Shoebox appeal is an opportunity to make a difference. Your neighbour who can't manage out the door much anymore is an opportunity to make a difference. Young people in your life, who rebel because they don't know how else to communicate is an opportunity to make a difference. The emptiness in your partner's eyes is an opportunity to make a difference.

Just look and listen, and you might be surprised how easy it is to see:

- Those who are hungry – for food, for friendship;
- Those who are thirsty – for water, for love;

- Those who are strangers, new to the country, new to the village, the outsiders; and then those who are well-known, familiar faces, but who *feel* like strangers and outsiders;
- Those who are needing the warmth of cloths, or the warmth of an embrace;
- Those who are ill, scared and alone, and those who make themselves *feel* ill because they are scared or alone;
- And those who are in prison – Her Majesty’s Royal Prison, or a prison they built around themselves...

Just look, and listen, and you will find those who need you. And by serving them, you will be serving Jesus himself.

So lend out your best brolly, to save yourself pain and embarrassment later. After all, Jesus deserves our best. Because if ever *you* are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or in prison – Jesus will be looking out for your needs too. When you unexpectedly get caught in the rain, Jesus will send *you* a brolly, without holes in it, through the person handing you it.

God loves us very much. Let’s love him back, by loving others; let’s *serve him*, by serving others.

Amen