

There is the story of the man who came down from the North Carolina mountains. He was all dressed up and carrying his Bible. A friend saw him and asked, "Elias, what's happening? Where are you going all dressed up like that?" Elias said, "I've been hearing about New Orleans. I hear that there is a lot of free-running liquor and a lot of gambling and a lot of real good naughty shows." The friend looked him over and said, "But Elias, why are you carrying your Bible under your arm?" And Elias replied, "Well, if it's as good as they say it is, I might stay over until Sunday."

What we say and what we do ...

All through Matthew's gospel Jesus stresses the necessity

- of doing righteous deeds
 - of doing good things that are visible before others
 - and lead to God being given due recognition
- for example in Matthew 5:16 Jesus says:
In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father
- the aim being to glorify God, not get personal reward or recognition

Matthew shows clearly and categorically

- that to respond to Jesus' invitation, to follow him is more than just assenting intellectually
- faith is to be expressed in righteous deeds and ethical behaviour like a wedding guest properly attired (22:1-14)
a servant faithfully performing duties (24:42-51)
a maiden who brings a sufficient supply of oil for her lamp (25:1-13)

The parable we heard read this morning highlights this

- it illustrates how people will be judged when they stand before Jesus, the King of Kings
- it should come as no surprise that the deeds a person has performed what someone has actually done, or not done are the basis for judgement

There are six "deeds", six things mentioned four times - can you recall them???

- feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless
- clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the imprisoned
- these things are spoken of repeatedly in the scriptures and cover the whole spectrum of ministry to the most vulnerable

For example, the prophet Isaiah described what God desires (58:6-7):

This is what it really means to worship the Lord. Remove the chains of prisoners who are chained unjustly. Free those who are abused! Share your food with everyone who is hungry; share your home with the poor and homeless. Give clothes to those in need.

Feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless
- clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the imprisoned
followers of Jesus are to attend to these six areas
- which sounds pretty much like pastoral care to me!

Just a reminder, as I said last week ...

- I am indeed aware there is pastoral care going on in our parish
pastoral care goes on and it is great
a heart-felt thank you to all of you who are part of this vital ministry
- however ... the “preacher's but” ... we do not have a “system”
my observation is that some people experience wonderful care
and some people give great care
- while there are others who miss out, slip through the cracks
there are opportunities that are not responded to
- which is why we are having this 'focus on Pastoral Care'
as an encouragement and a reminder

Feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless
- clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the imprisoned

The ones who receive Jesus' reward in the parable

- did one or more of these six things
and of course we all say “yes!”, “Amen!” to that
- the thing to notice is that the people who receive Jesus' harsh judgement
Jesus' anger, Jesus' punishment
also agreed those six things
- feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless
clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the imprisoned
- are what people in general and them in particular should do
that was not the issue ... so what was???

What was the question they asked?

*Lord, when did we see **you** hungry or thirsty or alone and away from home or without clothes or sick or in prison? When did we see these things and not help **you**?*

It is not that they did not do it

- it is who did they do it, or not do it, to or for???
- so they asked Jesus, and what was his answer ...
*anything you refused to do for even the least of my people here,
you refused to do for me*

Or as *The Message* puts it:

Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me – you failed to do it to me

The surprise in this parable is that when people respond to human need

- or fail to respond
they are in fact responding to, or failing to respond to, Jesus

This is a huge surprise to both groups ... those who do and those who do not
- those who provide food, drink, clothing, shelter for the needy
and visit the sick and imprisoned are surprised to learn
that there was a deeper dimension to their acts of human compassion

It would seem that all who have these needs
- and especially those who miss out, those who are ignored or overlooked
because they are not important, because they are troublesome or difficult
are the ones Jesus had in mind to be cared for in this way

I have been reflecting on this over the past week
- and my take is that this parable is addressed to all Christians
warning that what will count in the end
are deeds of love and mercy performed for the needy
- and yes, there is a whole world out there that needs all these six things
food, drink, shelter, clothing, care when sick or in prison
- however today, right now, this parable is addressed to *us*
to us as members of the Mangawhai/Wellsford Mission District
- yes we are to work for justice and the good things of life for all
but in the first instance we are to address the needs of the people we know
the people we come across day by day, who come within our orbit, our notice
- the people who are connected to us in some way

When any of these folk receive food, drink, shelter, clothing, care when sick or in prison
- Jesus does
we are assured that when we attend to this it will make a difference
and what is more, it will begin to change the world for good

It is all about putting what we say and what we stand for, into practice
- the letter of James addresses this in chapter 2, verse 14 on
I do not think I can put it better than James does
here are a couple of verses from *The Message*

For instance you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit! and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup - where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?"

I really like that: isn't it obvious that *God-talk* without *God-acts* is outrageous nonsense!
- again, sounds a lot like Pastoral Care to me ...

And this "pastoral care" is for anyone and everyone we might come across
- people we know, people we meet whose needs we are able to deal with
for example last Sunday there was a person who came to church
who because of our theme, Pastoral Care, was encouraged to talk to me
about their situation
- and as a church family we were able to help by giving some food there and then
from our foodbank basket
- what we say and what we do ...

It is about responding to situations as they arise

- and sometimes they arise in amazing ways ...

Early in my time as Vicar of Motueka Anglican Parish this was shown to me very clearly. I received a phone call from someone I did not know in Kaikoura. He had spoken to the Vicar there about a situation, and that Vicar said get in contact with the Vicar of Motueka, so he did. The guy told me about a couple who lived in our parish area – they were not members of our church but they had received some bad news – would I be able to visit them? Of course I would! They lived out in the country and as I was still finding my way around the area I had to consult the map. I worked out how to get to where they were and went that afternoon; with a cooked chicken, coleslaw, buns and chocolate biscuits. The couple were blown away. They said it showed God really cared about them if he could arrange something like that for them.

What we say and what we do ... (rewards?)

- can you remind me of those six “deeds” Jesus highlights in the parable ...

feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering the homeless

clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the imprisoned

- and who are those we are to do this for ...

any of Jesus' people, no matter how unimportant they seem

- and just who are Jesus' people ...

For us in the Mangawhai/Wellsford Mission District it is any of us

- anyone we have a connection with through one of our groups or ministries

Rhythm'n'Riggle, Bible study, Op Shop ...

- our family, neighbours, friends, colleagues, workmates, somebody we know somebody we meet ...

- in short anyone who we come across with a particular need

that we as followers of Jesus, as a church, are able to do something about

I encourage you to notice and be aware of the needs of others in our church family

- in your family or neighbourhood

that we may be able to help with

- and in the first instance tell me, or one of our Wardens

Then I invite you to consider

- could you provide something for a “Freezer/Food Ministry”?

could you perhaps visit someone on behalf of our church?

- if you have an interest in this “Pastoral Care”

I am inviting you to meet with me and others so we can work on it together

please add your name to the list on the noticeboard, or talk to me

When we see a person who needs some assistance and provide it

- when we put at God's disposal what we have

amazing things, even miracles, can happen

- and we will all be able to hear these words from Jesus:

Come, my Father has given you his blessing.

Receive the kingdom God has prepared for you since the world was made.