

TFTD 23.34 Saturday April 1st

When he comes: Matthew ch. 25



Jesus said, I tell you the truth — just as you did it for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me. Matthew 25.40

AS we approach Palm Sunday, take time to read again the Palm Sunday story (Matt 21.1-11) and imagine yourself as one of the crowd. Quite suddenly, as you crest the ridge of the Mount of Olives, you can see the holy city spread out beneath you, its golden marble walls glinting in the sun. It's a breathtaking view now — even more then, to this pilgrim crowd from Galilee, seeing Herod's temple below them, one of the wonders of

the ancient world. There's the pilgrim crowd that has escorted Jesus down from Galilee: he's their prophet, the local boy made good (21.11). There are mysterious supporters in the local villages, who recognize the king's authority and willingly allow him to use their property (21.3). Jesus' disciples have heard him proclaim the kingdom and followed him all the way from Capernaum: this is the moment they've been waiting for.

But when the King comes into his own — what kind of a welcome will he get? Not everybody is pleased to see him — and even those who think they are waiting for him, watching for his coming, don't always recognise the moment when it comes.

That's the point of the parable of the ten bridesmaids (25.1-13). We could probably think of other examples — like queuing all day to see the Coronation, and then missing the moment because you've gone off to buy a sandwich. Or like sitting all day in the bird-hide to spot the red-necked phalarope, and missing it because you're checking your emails. We think of “patience” as a rather passive virtue — what you need when waiting for a

train or sitting in the doctor's waiting-room. But you also need to keep alert — or you'll miss hearing your name called. However long the wait, we need to keep focused.

And watchfulness isn't just an attitude of mind — it's doing the work of the kingdom in the here and now. Jesus doesn't want his church to get hung up on signs and dates (24.36). He wants her to be faithful and active in his service.

That's why the parable of the talents comes just here (25.14). Like the bridesmaids, the three servants in this parable don't know when their master is coming back — but he has given them a task to perform. A talent was a huge sum of money, and the servants (slaves) were expected to use their own initiative to maximize the master's profits.

As in so many of the parables, there's a contrast between two attitudes. One is a cautious, careful stewardship, focused on keeping the precious trust safe at all costs: wrap it up and bury it in the ground(v.18). But that isn't the attitude Jesus commends. The servants who are praised have a kind of risk-taking faithfulness, a faithfulness that's

prepared to get its hands dirty and put its talent to work (vv.21, 23).

And this leads into the last and greatest of Jesus' parables, the parable of the sheep and the goats(25.31-46). When the Son of Man comes in his glory, it isn't just the faithful few who see him — it's all the nations who stand before the judge.

And this judgement isn't about your nationality — or even whether you belong to the church. It's about whether you've shown, in some small way, that compassion for lost and broken humanity that is at the core of Jesus' vision of the kingdom of heaven: feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, welcoming the stranger.

The people who look into Jesus' face and find there a dawning recognition that reaches down to their innermost being — these are not necessarily the religious people, the churchgoers; they didn't even know they were serving Jesus. But they were: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me.”

God bless,

Loveday

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do also for you: give us the will to be the servant of others as you were the servant of all, and gave up your life and died for us, but are alive and reign, now and forever.

[Common Worship Post-Communion for the Fifth Sunday in Lent, © The Archbishops' Council 2006]