

Sometimes you have to sit down to say something. Sometimes things are too intimate for standing up, too personal, too close. Sometimes, sitting down is the only way for something to be communicated, for something to be said.

Sometimes you want to say something as a person, not a priest. As a fellow traveller, not the ordained, collared up, clergy shirt wearer of the community. Sometimes you just want to share, without the weight of office. Sometimes you have to sit down to say something.

God, sometimes the bible can be very hard work. I think we should tell God this more often. God, we should say, what are we to make of this reading from Matthew, all the nations gathered before you, sheep and goats, righteous and unrighteous, right and left, eternal punishment and eternal life?

What on earth is this all about? How are we to make sense of this in the age of Amazon, Ali Baba and the nano conductor? How do we explain this to our children? How is this an example of the God who loves everyone, all the nations. God, sometimes the bible can be very hard work, and seems very discouraging.

I sit down to ask God these questions. Because sometimes you have to sit down to say something.

I have been asking these questions for a long time, and this is what I think ...

... even in the gospel of Matthew, which is the harshest I think of the gospels, Jesus is there for those who are the least and the lowly, the lost and the lonely. He loves them, he listens to them. He longs for them. He is always saying that God is for them, no matter who they are or what they have done. He is always telling them that God sees **them**, not broken rules and regulations, not busted rituals and ceremonies. That in him, God's salvation has come ... and it's for them.

True, for the past two weeks we have heard that in the Kingdom of God we need to pay attention, work hard and not give up .... that there is a possibility of missing out. But do we really think that sheep and goats, righteous and unrighteous, left and right, eternal punishment and eternal life hinge on paying attention, working hard and not giving up? That the consequences of not doing these things is the fire reserved for the devil and his angels?

This seems to be completely against everything that we have read and heard of Jesus so far.

This is what I think ... that those who miss out from the parables we have heard over the past two weeks... don't miss out on their eternal reward ... what they miss out on, is the Kingdom of God now, the precious gift of developing relationship with God now, the privilege of paying attention, working hard and not giving up, now, they miss out on intimacy with God, now. And that's tragic ... and that's the heart of Matthews warning.

They get started but don't follow through ... so they miss out ... on all that the Kingdom has to offer, now.

So, if that's the case with missing out, what's going on in our reading with eternal punishment, the fire reserved for the devil and his angels? That is if we believe such a thing exists, and who knows, the scripture speaks of judgement in many places, so even if it's not this ... it will be something.

Again, this is what I think ... if we go back in the gospel of Matthew to the beginning of chapter 23 these are the headings in my NT. Jesus denounces the Scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus Laments over Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple foretold, Signs of the End of the Age and Persecution, The Desolating Sacrifice, The Coming of the Son of Man, The Lesson of the Fig Tree, The Necessity for

Watchfulness, the Faithful or Unfaithful Slave, The Bridesmaids, The Talents, The Great Judgement and The Plot to Kill Jesus.

The section starts with a denouncement of the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jerusalem, the very ones who should have welcomed Jesus with open arms. Moves through Jesus love for Jerusalem and warnings about the end, warnings about paying attention, working hard and not giving up .... And then Judgement ...

But that's not the end, it finishes with the plot to kill Jesus ... "When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, you know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him."

We began with the Scribes and the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jerusalem, the very ones who should have welcomed Jesus with open arms, and Jesus denouncement of them. We finish with the Chief Priests and the Elders of the people, the religious leaders of Jerusalem, the very ones who should have welcomed Jesus with open arms ... conspiring to kill him.

If there is such a thing, these are the ones who I think will be drafted for eternal punishment, for judgement. These are the ones who continually oppose Jesus and the work of God. These are the ones Jesus continually speaks against. These are the ones who opt out of the Kingdom, rather than in.

The unrepentant Jesus and God haters, the powers that array against the gospel, these who have sort with all their being to kill the life God has promised and given the world ... these are who will be in trouble.

Not the gathered throng, not the ordinary people who feed their friends and family and neighbours, who care for one another, who practise human kindness whether religious or not, for these didn't even know they were doing good works for God ...and that's good, because this parable is not about good works, it is about faith.

Faith to believe that whatever we have done, whoever we are Jesus loves us, because this has been Jesus message to ordinary people right through this gospel. Even if we have not paid attention, worked hard or if we have given up. The crowds who even the religious leaders, know, are for Jesus, because in their plotting they acknowledge, "not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

The people who by misfortune or bedevilment, by mishap or getting side tracked or going up a wrong road ... have missed out ... the wise men of other religions, the wayward disciples, the lepers, the jack booted occupying army, the tax collectors, the blind, lame and mad, those who break the sabbath ... the people who for whatever reason ... weren't paying attention, working hard or gave up, ... but believed that Jesus loved them ... those who missed out on the glories of the kingdom now ... won't miss them again...

The people ... And that includes all of us ... Hallelujah!

That's what I think.

Thanks be to God.

Sometimes you just have to sit down to say something.

Amen.