Sermon on Sunday 22 November 2026

by Rev. Alan Stewart

Readings: Psalm 25 & Matthew 25. 31-40

The billy goat in all of us

'When you're a star, they let you do it. You can do *anything.'*

Those are the chilling words of the current President of the United States of America. And it's true, it seems, of people like him; and many other powerful people, including several British showbiz 'stars'. And the crimes of these 'stars', of course, are always enabled by others; by those who have colluded or kept silent or looked the other way.

In recent years, Russell Brand has very publically converted to Christianity. Following his recent convictions, however, his lack of remorse, repentance and humility leaves us with a question; what kind of Christ is he following?

It's the same question we need to ask of the MAGA movement in the US and the so-called Christian Nationalists or Patriots in this country. What kind of Christ are they following?

Today, the Christian Church celebrates the feast of Christ the King, and it's easy to make some wrong assumptions about that title because this Christ is definitely not the kind of royalty we know. No wealth, no privilege, no political or military power, and

yet, I would argue that he was the most powerful ‘king’ that’s ever lived.

Jesus had power. There’s no doubt about that. Many believe he had supernatural power, yes, but he was also an incredibly gifted public speaker and storyteller. He had the crowds eating out of his hand, most of them poor, hungry and vulnerable.

So, he could have used his power to incite violence against the Roman occupation, for example; set himself up as a mini-dictator. But he didn’t.

He could have used his power to get rich by preying on the poor, like some TV evangelist. But he didn’t.

He could have created a cult of celebrity who would worship the ground he stood on. But… he didn’t.

His power was not about domination or control. Jesus’ power lay in humility, vulnerability and compassion; each one a measure of courage.

Centuries ago, the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, wrote, ‘The measure of a man is in what he does with his power’.

So, what did Jesus do with his?

Well, he washed feet. He lifted up the downtrodden. He spoke up for the voiceless, fed the poor, challenged corruption; he forgave the unforgiveable.

But, hold on, how do we square that with our reading today which talks of angels and thrones and judgment and separating sheep from goats, and goes on later to talk about eternal life for the sheep and eternal punishment for the goats?

Some of us might welcome this idea of Christ the King condemning to eternal punishment the goats, whoever we deem them to be. But, personally, that doesn't sit too well with me. That doesn't sound like the king I've just been describing. So, let me offer an alternative way of looking at these words of Jesus.

A few years ago, Robert Lentz, the iconographer (that's someone who paints, or technically 'writes' religious icons), was asked to create an image of Christ as the Good Shepherd, to which he agreed on one proviso: The Shepherd will be holding a **goat**, not a sheep; an old smelly stubborn goat.

The Good Shepherd, you might remember from the parable, famously went after the lost sheep. This Good Shepherd goes after the lost goats. And it was with the goats, of course - the undesirables, the outsiders, the 'sinners' - that Jesus spent most of his time.

Jesus says the sheep are the ones who feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, tend the sick and visit the prisoner. And the goats; well, they don't. They're more concerned

about themselves, wrapped up in their own needs. There's a sheep and a goat in all of us. Lentz's icon suggests that Christ loves both.

Priest and writer Dave Tomlinson, in his book *OMG (A Bad Christian's Book of Prayers)*, talks about the goatiness in all of us, 'The wild, untamed undomesticated parts that don't fit with our idealised image of who we are, or with how we wish to be seen'. And yet, he says, 'Each of these parts is still a part of us, part of the whole person who is loved and embraced by God without hesitation'. To grow spiritually, we need to accept the billy goat in all of us, so that, loved as it is by God, we too can learn to love our whole selves.

It's not until we face the truth of the goat in us that we can embrace the bigger truth; that we are loved regardless. That's my idea of what any final judgment might be… a recognition of the goat in all of us, and then a reset, a cleanse, a new beginning.

Jesus said that when we feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, visit the sick, we're not simply doing it *for* him, we're doing it *to* him. It's a call to see Christ in everyone and to respond.

I spoke at the beginning about those who enable abuse through collusion or silence. I believe our Western World and, in many parts the global Church, has been colluding with the terrible human rights abuse in Palestine. Fear has silenced the outrage we should all be feeling at the genocide that's going on in the name of self-defense. Last month, the Palestinian Church, the sons and daughters of the first Church, issued a call to the global Church. It's called Kairos Palestine II, and in it, our brothers and sisters

are asking us not to remain silent, not to turn away, but to prayerfully reflect on what response we should be making. This week, the St Andrew's PCC agreed unanimously to convene an ecumenical group to commit to meet, to pray and to share stories of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, and to work out what other support we can offer. If you would like to know more, please speak to me. One very practical and loving thing we can do is to help make hygiene kits for the girls and women of Gaza, which don't just protect health but also provide dignity. There's a drop-in workshop taking place at the Quaker Rooms on Saturday 28 November, 10.00am-3.00pm.

Let me end with a final prayer from Dave Tomlinson again: 'May we distrust every impulse to silence voices different to our own. May we distrust every urge to avoid the path of honesty and vulnerability. May we distrust every claim to truth where truth is not wedded to love. May we distrust every option that fails to bring us more fully alive to others, to ourselves and to the world.'

Amen



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