

Devotional Blog

Sunday 22nd November

It was a wet, windswept day in the autumn half-term. As I made my way along Hampton Hill High Street, I spotted it. There, collecting raindrops was a Gopak table and on it were a handful of plastic bags with fruit and other food inside them. The bags were clearly the remnant of earlier activity, left on the unattended table along with a tub of hand sanitiser. Along the front of the table a number of A4 sheets had been taped in a row. The first one proclaimed "Free lunches for children", The other four sheets carried the slogan "No child should ever go hungry"

This beautiful act of kindness by a local parent was just one part of the campaign championed by the young Manchester United footballer, Marcus Rashford. Marcus had argued for food vouchers to be available to needy children during the half term.

Many individuals, organisations and some local Councils stepped up to the plate and provided food to local children. A wave of compassion and charity spilled out across the land, not just in Hampton Hill.

The campaign worked. Food vouchers will be provided during school holidays up to and including Easter next year.

Action for justice and charitable works is the territory well known by Christians. Indeed, so many charities have their origins in the warmth of Christian love.

Locally, charitable work by The Extra Mile and Baby Basics have between them supported over 2,000 local children. Local Foodbanks often rely on Christian volunteers and donations. While international charities like Action for Children, Christian Aid, Tearfund and All We

Can benefit from churches who daily act out the second most important command to “love your neighbour”.

Do Christians do this in the hope of gaining eternal life? Absolutely not!

Salvation can't be earned by good deeds and charity. We are saved by God's freely given love and grace.

Christians engage in charity work because they want to share the love that God pours down on them. Compassion is the result of love not fear.

But if you ask what does the Bible say about the situation when we don't have compassion, when we don't act in love and charity? Well the go to Gospel passage for this question is Matthew 25:31-46. The story of the sheep and the goats.

The story tells of the end of time, when Jesus will judge everyone and sort them into two categories: sheep, who have done the caring, compassionate things to the “least”, and goats who haven't.

Neither group seems to know what Jesus means. So, he points out that when the “least” are fed, clothed, visited it was him, Jesus, who was helped.

This is powerful stuff. When we act in charity, we are actually helping the Son of God.

Now it is fair to say that you can argue that the “least” are actually the disciples, the believers who take the Christian faith out into the World. This makes the judgement about how disciples and believers are received.

Yet if we take the “least” to refer all human beings in need, it squares completely with many other Gospel passages about loving our neighbours, and the Church bias to the poor.

So, let's embrace both ways of looking at this text. You see, the big message is that Jesus teaches that what we choose to do makes a difference. He says clearly and forcefully that those who think that there are no consequences to their actions are mistaken.

In a world that can seem too big to be changed, our lives, our own choices have more meaning and value than we imagine.

Loving those for whom Jesus gave his life, particularly those who are undervalued is a primary expression of our love of God and of our experience of God's love for us.

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