

SERVICE OF MORNING PRAYER FROM
THE NEW ZEALAND PRAYER BOOK, NOVEMBER 22, 2020



*(Please respond where you see text in **bold print**)*

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.
(Romans 5:5)

Great is the Lord and worthy of all praise.

**Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom,
thanksgiving and honour, power and might,
be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.**

As the scriptures are read,
we can allow God's word to speak to us,
and ponder its meaning for our lives.
In our prayers, we give thanks for God's goodness,
we pray for others as well as for ourselves,
and we offer our lives anew in Christ's service.
All this we do,
because we believe in the presence among us
of our Saviour Jesus Christ,
and in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit.

Hear these words of scripture.

Love one another,
for love is of God,
and whoever loves is born of God and knows God.
Spirit of God, search our hearts.

Let us observe a moment of silence,
remember our need for God's forgiveness.

**Almighty and merciful God,
we have sinned against you,
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with all our heart.
We have not loved others
as our Saviour Christ loves us.
We are truly sorry.
In your mercy forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.**

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

O come, let us sing to the Lord, **let us rejoice in the rock of our salvation.**
We sing to you, O God, and bless your name; **and tell of your salvation from day to day.**
We proclaim your glory to the nations, **your praise to the ends of the earth.**

Psalm 100

We are God's people, the sheep of his pasture.

Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands; **serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence
with a song. We are God's people, the sheep of his pasture.**

Know this: The Lord himself is God; **he himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people
and the sheep of his pasture. We are God's people, the sheep of his pasture.**

Enter his gates with thanksgiving; **go into his courts with praise; give thanks to him and call
upon his name. We are God's people, the sheep of his pasture.**

For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his faithfulness endures from age to age. **We are God's people, the sheep of his pasture.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

A reading from the Book of Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel reading Matthew 25:31-46

The Lord be with you, **and also with you**

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew, **praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the

foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The Gospel of Christ, **Glory to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

THE SERMON

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

"Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." How noble. This scripture has long spoken to me powerfully and completely, I cannot help but be moved. But I have a couple lingering questions, am I a goat or am I a sheep! And if possible, how can I avoid winding up in the goat pen.

This scripture describes the final day of judgement, when all nations will be separated as are sheep and goats. Those who gave the hungry food & the thirsty drink, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, took care of the sick and visited the prisoner will inherit the kingdom prepared for them, but those who did not do these things will depart into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For these acts, done to one of the least, are done to the Lord. This scripture is part of Matthew's fifth narrative, positioned almost at the end of the gospel. In this discourse, Jesus travels to Jerusalem where he preaches in the temple, confronts the Pharisees and others hostile to him, and speaks to his disciples about the future and the end of time. It is preceded by parables of preparation for the final judgement, and is followed by the passion narrative.

Last fall, in the New Testament course I took, our major assignment was to undertake a deep study of a scripture passage of our choice. I thought to myself, this is it. I can indulge in some serious reading of this cherished passage. Needless to say, there has been much ink spilled trying to untangle Matthew's meaning here, and I know that I am not alone in my love of the passage. However, imagine how startled I was to learn that it doesn't quite mean what I always thought it did! It is much more nuanced than the "do good works and wind up in heaven" message that we are tempted to assume and quick to proclaim. Even while preparing for this sermon today, I discovered new meanings, and frankly, this has made me love the passage even more.

Although not really a parable, this passage is very parable like in that its meaning is not immediately obvious and requires some untangling. Who is the "Son of Man", who are "all the nations" being judged, who are the "goats & sheep", who are "the least of these", why are people confused by the result of their actions (or lack of actions). Why am I getting eternal life, or conversely, eternal punishment? If we are to fully comprehend this powerful message of our reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, then we must untangle two important pieces.

Firstly, to whom is Matthew referring as "all the nations"? Scholars agree that here Matthew is referring to a group of any kind, not nations as we think of them now, but a group other than one's own, likely the gentiles who were the object of missionary activity at the time. And secondly, who are "the least of these"? Matthew is vague here. We'll have more to say on that later.

There's good news for those who would be the sheep, as Jesus proclaims, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Much to their surprise, and this is important, these somewhat bewildered sheep have made it in. Their confusion is critical here. There is no ulterior motive, no fast-tracking to the next life, no score keeping. They are not being judged on what they have done, but rather the spirit in which they performed these acts. Despite certainly facing hardships themselves, as gentiles receiving the good news of Jesus Christ certainly did in the early days, "they went the way of the cross and now find themselves at the right hand of the Son of Man." They will now inherit the kingdom, an inheritance being something you receive by virtue of being you, and nothing else. The criteria for judgement is not confession, but mercy. As one scholar writes, "Their actions are a sign of their relationship with a loving and merciful God, with the Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve." The Lord's disciples were sent out from the Lord's Supper as the body of Christ only to discover that the body of Christ is already waiting for them in those suffering in the world. Judgement has in fact been proclaimed in the needs of our neighbours, our companions and our foes. The sheep have chosen to establish relationships with the weakest,

the most vulnerable and there they find Christ himself. And through Christ, they are reconciling themselves to God, showing love and mercy, expecting no reward.

And what of the poor old goats? Have you seen that meme making the rounds on Facebook? It is a picture of a goat declaring, "I don't want to adult any more, don't even want to human. I want to goat: jump around randomly, eat what I want, and head butt anyone who annoys me." Sounds perhaps just like the goats in Matthew's story. In true to goat fashion, they have been looking out for their own interests, not worrying about or noticing the needs of others, making no effort to be in relationship with the son of man. This was, and maybe still is, very much the cultural norm. The Roman provinces of the ancient world were highly hierarchical, gifts and/or debt being the hallmarks of most relationships, where there would be nothing in it for you to do business with those who could never repay. Doesn't sound so different from the cultural forces of today, where the few hold most of the world's wealth, where an economic system based on consumption has created a new kind of slavery and is destroying the planet. Not many are concerned for the weak and our reconciliation with God seems remote.

And who are these least ones who cannot repay anyway? Matthew is vague here; this provides us with another unexpected twist. Scholars suggest that perhaps Matthew was reluctant to tell us who the least of these were for fear that we would all wind up in the goat pen. By constantly searching and performing "good works" for the ones we perceive to be "least", are we not missing opportunities for mercy and relationship with our Lord in favor of righteousness? Are we missing the point? In fact, why are we even trying to place people along some kind of sliding scale, where the least are on one side, and the most on the other? Does this not expose an attitude of expected reward for works undertaken? This in fact does more to preserve vulnerability than support it. What the sheep understand, is that by establishing relationships with all, they are establishing a relationship with Christ himself, and that is their reward. Through Christ they have experienced the kingdom of God. The son of man is not coming, he is already here.

The son of man is not coming, he is already here. Jesus is one of the least of these. And so is our neighbour, our adversary, our critic, and our most ardent supporter. Our friend, our colleague, our relative and our enemy. And by engaging in that relationship with these least, with Jesus Christ, we are powerfully reconciling our relationship with a God of love and mercy. By showing mercy and love to all, even our enemies, we are entering in to the kingdom of heaven. God's love and mercy extends to all, and through Jesus Christ it is known to those who may deserve and those who may not. Our job is to be in that relationship and flourish with joy.

Many years ago a friend was visiting from out of town, and the two of us, together with her elderly mother Maureen, ventured out to the liquor store to buy some wine for the evening. As we left the store there was a man outside asking for spare change. In one single unbroken motion, Maureen opened her purse, pulled out \$20 and gave it to the man. My friend said to

her, “Mother you shouldn’t just give away money,” and with out even pausing to draw breath she said, “He might be Jesus.” I have never forgotten that moment. Maureen is no goat. She recognizes Jesus in all, and acts with mercy and joy, for no other reason other than as an expression of her relationship with God.

Amen.

APOSTLES CREED

Let us say together the Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Lord be with you.

The Lord bless you.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, we pray

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

Make your ways known upon earth, O God, your saving power among all peoples.

Renew your Church in holiness, and help us to serve you with joy.

Guide the leaders of this and every nation, that justice may prevail throughout the world.

Let not the needy, O God, be forgotten, nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

Make us instruments of your peace, and let your glory be over all the earth.

THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSIONS

Heavenly Father,
you have promised to hear when we pray
in the name of your Son.
Therefore in confidence and trust
we pray for the Church: our National church, our diocese and our parish.

Father, enliven the Church for its mission
that we may be salt of the earth and light to the world.
Breathe fresh life into your people.
Give us power to reveal Christ in word and action.

We pray for the world: especially Nicaragua and other Central American countries recently devastated by hurricanes.

Creator of all,
lead us and every people into ways of justice and peace.
That we may respect one another in freedom and truth.
Awaken in us a sense of wonder for the earth and all that is in it.
Teach us to care creatively for its resources.

We pray for the community: for our City of New Westminster.

God of truth, inspire with your wisdom
those whose decisions affect the lives of others
that all may act with integrity and courage.

Give grace to all whose lives are linked with ours.

May we serve Christ in one another, and love as he loves us.

We pray for those in need: especially Chantel.

God of hope, comfort and restore
all who suffer in body, mind or spirit.

May they know the power of your healing love.

Make us willing agents of your compassion.

Strengthen us as we share in making people whole.

We remember those who have died and those who mourn: our brothers Leif and Vladim, and our sisters Peggy, Donna and Irena.

We remember with thanksgiving those who have died in the faith of Christ, and those whose faith is known to you alone.

Father, into your hands we commend them.

Give comfort to those who mourn.

Bring them peace in their time of loss.

We praise you for (N and) all your saints
who have entered your eternal glory.

May their example inspire and encourage us.

We pray for ourselves and our ministries: please remember at this time those who you know who are in need of our prayers.

Lord, you have called us to serve you.

Grant that we may walk in your presence:

your love in our hearts,

your truth in our minds,

your strength in our wills;

until, at the end of our journey,

we know the joy of our homecoming

and the welcome of your embrace,

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

COLLECT APPOINTED FOR THIS DAY

Almighty and everlasting God,
whose will it is to restore all things
win your well-beloved Son, our Lord and King,
grant that the peoples of the earth,
now divided and enslaved by sin,
may be freed and brought together

under his gentle and loving rule;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all. Amen.

COLLECT FOR MORNING

Holy and ever-living God,
by your power we are created
and by your love we are redeemed;
guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,
that we may give ourselves to your service,
and live each day in love to one another and to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

DISMISSAL

Go now to love and serve the Lord. Go in peace. **Amen. We go in the name of Christ.**



Presider today, Martha Cameron

"A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare O Aotearoa". Anglican Prayer Book, 1988.
<https://anglicanprayerbook.nz/030.html>.