

## “The nature of judgement” a sermon based on Matthew 25:31-46 preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright on 16 November 2014

Last Sunday we commissioned one of our student members to work with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea among migrant communities, under the auspices of the Global Mission Office of the New Zealand Presbyterian Church.

Max arrived in Seoul on Tuesday and since then Max's life has been eventful, to say the least. The migrant centre where Max is working is run by Pastor Kim. Pastor Kim has worked for better rights for migrant workers for over twenty years, and has been arrested and beaten for his efforts. Max says he is an inspiring yet humble man. The centre includes a shelter and kitchen for homeless foreign workers and a school for workers' children. "My first job was to team up with the church labour crew to scrounge heaters and chairs at an abandoned building. Nobody spoke English so it was quite an experience to communicate. My accommodation was also quite a culture shock for me." Max is sleeping on the floor, as many Koreans do. Thursday was spent teaching English in challenging circumstances. The experience, he says, has been more than he thought it might be and it does not look like it will diminish in the weeks to come.

What leads Max to do this, when he might be resting from a year of University? Max grew up seeing extreme poverty first hand. He lived amid people begging for food, without a home, without safety, without warmth, without security, without the most basic necessities. They remain in his mind, although he is now far from them, in a safer, more comfortable environment. So he asked to serve overseas.

A week ago I went to the funeral of a friend in Whanganui. My friend's early family life was a struggle. Her mother was unable to care for the children; then her father died. She and her siblings went into a Children's home our Church ran. One of the congregation members offered her support and took her into their family. She trained and worked as a nurse and became a hospital matron. Fifty years later when the Church established a Community Living Trust for psychiatric survivors, my friend was one of our most committed helpers and early supporters. Every year she put on an afternoon tea for all our residents; at her funeral were many who enjoyed her hospitality. She was an inspiration to our congregation. She never forgot where she had come from, how easily her life could have ended up differently. She never talked about it, but it was evident at her funeral that her early experience of being without parents, of being in a family of someone with a mental illness, of being placed in a children's home, motivated a great deal of what she did. People from the Trust were there at her funeral to express gratitude.

It was impossible to think of my friend without thinking of what she did for people, especially people in need. It wasn't an add-on to her gardening, her hospitality, her baking, her work ... her life was a whole, and everything was integrated.

So it is for the people in this drama Jesus outlines. The people who do not care for those in need and the people who care for those in need are equally oblivious to what they actually did, who they actually are. It was the way they were. The difference is that now they know. The way they were is now revealed, now transparent, now clear, now evident – now they see themselves as they truly are.

Matthew puts last in the ministry of Jesus this ultimate test of national, community, family life/ It is as if Jesus is saying, of all that I have said and done, after all is said and done, here is the one thing, the one thing I want to leave you with, the key performance indicator, the one test of all your life – church life, national life, family life, societal life – how did you treat people in need?

This question is central to the Bible's understanding of life in history. The Bible conveys the conviction that history and human life have meaning and purpose, that life has meaning, that what nations and communities and families and people do can be assessed, that life has an end, so there can be a test.

As Fred Craddock says, "History has an alpha and an omega, a genesis and a conclusion, a beginning and an end. It is God who finishes history just as it is God who starts it. The creator of all things is the completer of all things. God did not begin the world and then abandon it, leaving us all victims of some cosmic accident or meaningless coincidence or cruel surprise. "

The end of all things is judgement. Judgement here is truth, truth as transparency, truth as disclosure, complete disclosure, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth - truth as everything made evident, everything revealed - even the most complex, the most unclear, the most hidden, the most intractable. Judgement here is absolute transparency about the quality of our living around one question – how did we respond to people in need? What does that mean?

That I can be absolutely myself, the person I was created to be, my natural being - I don't need a mask. I don't need to pretend. I don't need to exaggerate or underplay who I am. I can be me, because it will be revealed in any case one day.

That who I am will be evident, amid all the ambiguities, uncertainties, mixed motives, unconscious drives, confused goals, hidden purposes, inherent contradictions, exaggerations, minimised mistakes, self-referencing assessments, disguises, masks, pretence, and not just mine, ours, those of our church, our society, our country, our family, our world.

Everything will be laid bare, transparent, evident – according to one searing question, one searching light – how did we respond to people in need?

I long for this judgement, this transparency, this truthfulness, for myself and for our world and I long for it now.

Show us God, the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner.

Show us God, how we might be feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, visiting the prison.

Show us God, how I am not doing that, not just in my daily life, but in the systems of which I am a part, through the policies I support, the church in which I participate, the community I serve, the city I inhabit.

Show us God, amid TPPA, amid the G20 meeting in Brisbane, amid all politicians claim and state, amid those to whom we want to respond and do not know how, show us ourselves and what we are doing, helpful or unhelpful.

Let the mist lift, let the fog clear, let the masks be removed, let the truth about me be known, now, to me, and, difficult as it is, to others as well, to each other, so that together we can get on, get on with living, and be part of this world God is bringing.

Because if this is the ultimate question, if this is the test, if this is the point, the purpose, the end, the meaning, if this is it, make me a part of it now.

Centuries ago, Christian leaders named the seven deadly sins, deadly, deathly, murderous, destructive, and one of them was acedia, a word that means "I don't care."

When all is said and done, when all is said and done, the one who is infinite love will call us, the world, the nations, the peoples to account - with one question – "How did you respond to human need?"