

BIBLE READING: Matthew 25:31-46

SERMON

Jesus claims to be poor, and hungry, and a stranger, and in prison, and sick, and thirsty. He claims to have nowhere to lay his head. He says to us, his disciples, "See all these sisters and brothers of mine who are homeless like me? They are me. I am them. To serve me you must serve them. When I come back, I will see what you are doing and whom you serve."

Then at the end of the whole Gospel he says, "Lo, I am with you to the end of the age."

You see, the problem is we think he is not here. And that he cannot see what we are doing. But he says he is with us always, to the end of the age. He already sees us. He knows who we are with and whom we are serving. We cannot expect to wait until the last minute before his coming and then scramble to do the work we know he has sent us out to do. We cannot deceive him into thinking we have been doing it all along.

Because he never left.

"I am these people. The poor you will always have with you. I am with you always to the end of the age. I am the poor. They are always with you. I am always with you. I am them and they are me. Serve me through them." We can scramble and rearrange the words any way we wish, but it always comes out the same. It is a description of what life is like in his kingdom. And we are the people of his kingdom.

When Jesus returns he will expect to see us carrying on his work. Bearing fruit worthy of repentance.

Reconciling the world. Choosing the way of life instead of the way of death.

Yet, often it seems to be just too much. There are too many hungry and poor and lonely people for us to make any difference.

There is an interesting story told about the scientist and writer, Loren Eiseley.

Eiseley was in the south of France, on the coast, attending a scientific symposium. He woke early one morning and went for a walk on the beach before sunrise. As he moved through the misty dawn he focused on a faint, far away figure. It was a youth, bending and reaching and flinging his arms, seemingly dancing on the beach. Eiseley thought, "No doubt he is dancing in celebration of the new day about to begin."

As he came nearer, he realised the youth was not dancing at all, but rather was bending to sift through the debris left by the night tide, stopping now and then to pick up a starfish and then, standing, heaving it back into the sea. He asked the youth the purpose of the effort. "The tide has washed the starfish onto the beach, and they cannot return to the sea by themselves," the youth replied. "When the sun rises, they will die, and the people come from town to pick them and sell them in the market place. I throw them back to the sea so they might live another day."

As the youth explained, Eiseley surveyed the vast expanse of beach, stretching in both directions beyond his sight. Starfish littered the shore in numbers beyond calculation. The youth's plan seemed hopeless. "But there are more starfish on this beach than you can ever save before the sun is up. Surely you cannot expect to make a difference?"

The youth paused to consider his words, then bent to pick up a starfish, whirled around and threw it as far as possible. Turning to the scientist he said simply, "I made a difference to that one," and kept dancing down the beach.

Eisely went back to his room, and the conference. All his life he had understood the coming and going of life to be part of the way of the universe. Natural selection. Until seeing the young man on the beach it had never occurred to him how important it is for one creature to help another, and how the seemingly natural order of things might be dramatically altered by the simple actions of one person.

The next morning, Eisely awoke, and again went down to the sea before dawn. There he joined the youth in the dance of life, one starfish at a time! Never before had he felt so alive and connected to our Creator God.

Whatever talents we have each been given, they are more than sufficient for us to do our part in the dance of life. Each simple action of our lives can make a difference in carrying on Jesus' work of reconciliation in the world.

We are the people who carry out the mission of the church, which is the mission of Jesus, our king. This is called life in his kingdom.

Bending, reaching, flinging our arms, one starfish at a time, we bring ourselves closer to others, closer to God and closer to ourselves. Amen.

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