

Dreghorn and Springside Parish Church
Sunday 22nd November 2020

Bible reading:

The Final Judgment

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes as King and all the angels with him, he will sit on his royal throne, ³² and the people of all the nations will be gathered before him. Then he will divide them into two groups, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the righteous people at his right and the others at his left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to the people on his right, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father! Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you ever since the creation of the world. ³⁵ I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, ³⁶ naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.’

³⁷ The righteous will then answer him, ‘When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸ When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me!’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Away from me, you that are under God's curse! Away to the eternal fire which has been prepared for the Devil and his angels! ⁴² I was hungry but you would not feed me, thirsty but you would not give me a drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger but you would not welcome me in your homes, naked but you would not clothe me; I was sick and in prison but you would not take care of me.’

⁴⁴ Then they will answer him, ‘When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and we would not help you?’ ⁴⁵ The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help me.’ ⁴⁶ These, then, will be sent off to eternal punishment, but the righteous will go to eternal life.”

Sermon: “The Messiah is among you”

A famous monastery had fallen on hard times. In the past, its magnificent buildings were filled with the buzz and busyness of young monks, and its once grand church resounded with choral singing, but now it was all but deserted. People no longer came by the monastery to connect with God, seek guidance and be nourished in prayer. Just a handful of old monks shuffled through the cloisters, still praising God but with worn out words and heavy hearts...

Now, on the edge of the monastery woods, an old rabbi had built a little hut. He would go there from time to time to fast and pray. No one ever spoke with him, but whenever he appeared, the word would be passed from monk to monk: "The rabbi walks in the woods." And, for as long as he was there, the monks would somehow feel sustained by his prayerful presence.

One day the abbot of the monastery decided to visit the rabbi and to open his heart to him. So, after the morning Eucharist, he set out into the woods. As he approached the hut, the abbot saw the rabbi standing in the doorway, his arms outstretched in welcome. It was as though he had been waiting there, for a long time. The two embraced each other like long-lost brothers. Then they stepped back and just stood there, smiling at one another with smiles that their faces could barely contain.

After a while the rabbi motioned the abbot to enter. In the middle of the room was a wooden table with the Scriptures open on it. They sat there for a moment, in the presence of the book. Then the

rabbi began to cry. The abbot could not contain himself. He covered his face with his hands and he began to cry, too. For the first time in his life, he cried his whole heart out. The two men sat there like lost little children, filling the hut with their sobs and wetting the wood of the table with their tears.

After the tears had passed and all was quiet again, the rabbi lifted his head. "You and your brothers are serving God with heavy hearts," he said. "You have come to ask a teaching of me. I will give you a teaching, but you can only repeat it once. After that, no one must ever say it aloud again." The rabbi then looked straight at the abbot and said, "The Messiah is among you." For a while, all was silent. Then the rabbi said, "Now you must go."

The abbot left without a word and without ever looking back. The next morning, the abbot called his monks together. He told them he had received a teaching from "the rabbi who walks in the woods" and that this teaching was never again to be spoken aloud. Then he looked at each of his brothers and said, "The rabbi says that the Messiah is among us." The monks were startled by this saying. "What could it mean?" they asked themselves. "Is Brother John the Messiah? Or Father Matthew? Or Brother Thomas? Am I the Messiah? What could this mean?" They were all deeply puzzled by the rabbi's teaching. But no one dared ever mention it again.

As time went by, the monks began to treat one another with a very special reverence. There was a gentle, wholehearted quality about them now which was hard to describe, but easy to notice. They lived with one another as men who had finally found something. But they prayed the Scriptures together as men who were always looking for something.

Occasional visitors found themselves deeply moved by the life of these monks. Before long, people were coming from far and wide to be nourished by prayer, and young men were asking, once again, to become part of the community. In those days, the rabbi no longer walked in the woods. His hut had fallen into ruins. But somehow or other, the old monks who had taken his teaching to heart still felt sustained by his prayerful presence.

Today Jesus, our Rabbi says to us 'the Messiah is among you'. How does that awareness shape the way you relate to each another, to your families, to your neighbour? "... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Take a moment to consider this, for the Messiah is among us now.

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22nd November 2020