

St Nicholas Parish Church, Prestwick

The Thought for the Week

Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020

I loved my job – and I still do! What other job in the world affords you the opportunity to be with people at their firesides and share so many aspects of their lives? What other profession brings you so many friendships and the opportunity to meet a whole host of wonderful people?

In each of my three parishes – rural, small town and county town, I had the privilege of counselling folk with various issues. In the privacy of the Vestry or in their own home, they would open up to me, and I can honestly say that many of their problems arose from the fact that they felt left out of society. They struggled with depression, anger, grief, loss, mental illness and spiritual oppression. Despite the fact they very often they had family and friends who cared about them, they still felt all at sea – isolated, not sure what direction in which they were heading, hopeless and, for many, cut off from God.

They felt left out and leftover.

O, there are so many ways we can all feel like leftovers, even the healthiest and the seemingly happiest among us. There are times when we say, “O, what’s the use?”

In each of the four Gospels, we read the story of Jesus feeding the 5000 men. An amazing phenomenon! St Matthew’s account of this miracle tells us that it was 5000 men, not counting the women and the children, so including them, the crowd that day by the Sea of Galilee would have been closer to 20,000! And all fed from a wee boy’s picnic lunch of five rolls and two fish.

Now, this amazing feat might have ended there, but St John tells us that when everyone had eaten, Jesus said to His disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over that nothing may be lost. So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.”

That is an amazing climax – Jesus cares about the leftovers.

And when our Lord is talking about leftovers here, He isn’t talking about daily rations, or God’s abundance. He is talking about people. And that sentiment shows up again and again in the story of the Gospel.

Jesus talks about being “the Good Shepherd”, such that none of His sheep will become lost.

When He prays on that Thursday night in the Garden of Gethsemane, He talks to God about how He has protected His disciples, that none of them have become lost.

“Gather up the fragments left over that nothing may be lost”

Jesus who will not let things go to waste.

Jesus who insists in gathering the fragments of bread, fragments of fish, fragments of people, all the broken pieces.

This is not about food. This is about you and me.

Nothing lost. Nothing unnoticed. No one overlooked. Nothing missed.

Jesus cares about the leftovers.

He doesn't want any of us to be lost, pushed aside, forgotten about.

Each time I climb the pulpit steps to lead God's people in worship, and I look out over the gathered congregation before me, I see lives that have been fractured, bruised, hurt; folk struggling with trials and temptations, yet putting on a brave face; people who feel unwanted, unloved.

I notice that man, who last Sunday was looking at his watch, and wondering if he was going to be on the first tee at one o'clock, this week, his world having crashed around him in the sudden passing of his wife, is listening for some word of comfort, some word of hope and assurance.

I see the lady, trying to retain her composure during the singing of the hymns, her life torn from its moorings in the diagnosis that she has received from her GP, terrified about what the future holds and at her wit's end, reaching out for light in her darkness.

Each time we take our place in that stately building which is St Nicholas, and we hear those words uttered at the start of the service, "Let us worship God!", I hope that you are aware of the One who stands amongst us and whispers,

"Bring Me your fragmented lives, your skills and weaknesses, your strengths and fears, your children and their futures. Bring them to Me – your failures and your mistakes, your hurts and challenges. Bring Me your hopes and dreams and convictions."

Friends, I am convinced that when life gets the best of us, perhaps it is because we concentrate on how little we can do, and too little on how much Jesus can do when we come to Him.

If I didn't believe that, I would never go into a pulpit again.

Each of us is valued by God. He has not overlooked us. Indeed, He has put us in His Divine basket

It remains to be seen how He is going to use you, but rest assured, He will!

The Reverend Fraser R Aitken

Locum Minister