

St Nicholas Church, Prestwick

The Thought for The Week

Sunday 22nd November 2020

It can only be in the United Kingdom, when we are reeling from the ongoing Coronavirus crisis and we are in a serious financial situation, when jobless numbers are rising, and the economy still looks bleak, when many folk will be facing a much scaled down Christmas, that we find time to get all worked up about “Britain’s Got Talent” and “Strictly Come Dancing”!

There is no doubt that we are an extraordinary nation, but at the same time a most generous one.

I am amazed at the vast amount of money that Children in Need has raised over the past forty years since its inception and its first broadcast on 21 November 1980.

Because as a nation, when we have been the poorest, and when our backs have been to the wall, we have often been the most generous and this is what Christ calls us to do as His followers. We are to be a giving people.

Yes, we are a generous people in the main. But we must not let that go to our heads. I can remember a headmaster of mine welcoming the first years to school on the first day of the new term and telling us that we were the cream of society – what a ridiculous thing to say to an eleven year old boy! Actually, if we were the cream then a few of us were clotted, because some of my contemporaries wasted their time at school, and indeed wasted their lives.

You may have gifts and privileges but it is what you do with them that actually matters: and what should we do with our privileges as Christians?

It is quite simple, for the Gospel tells us that we will be judged as everyone will be judged at the end of the day by how they treat the poor and the needy and the disenfranchised. To get this point home, Jesus told the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. It is such a powerful story.

“For as much as you have done it to the least of these, my brothers and my sisters, you have done it to Me,” says our Lord.

So whatever you think of Children in Need or charity sales or Traidcraft stalls or the Poppy Scotland Appeal or the Blythswood Shoe Boxes or the countless wonderful charities you personally support during the year, the purpose behind all our giving is to follow what actually Christ told us to do.

The saddest phrase used by some many in my opinion is “Charity begins at home...” –which often means that you have no intention of helping anyone except yourself.

Most of us have had the experience of collecting for a charity. It isn’t an easy thing to do.

You will have heard the old chestnut about the Christian Aid door to door collector who was confronted by a very gruff looking man, and when she asked him if he had the envelope that she had left, he replied, “The dog ate it!”

As quick as a flash, the lady answered, “O, I will give you another one.”

“Don’t bother,” he answered, “He’d eat that one as well!”

It can be soul destroying indeed, and those of us who have done it, have got the t-shirt!

For followers of the Lord, putting our hand into our purses and wallets, rolling up our sleeves to help raise funds, going out of our way to lend a helping hand to some soul struggling with life, is part of our DNA.

The final judgement is inevitable and it is uncomfortable. You can add it to the things that we really don't want to think about too much because we really have no personal solutions. Think of global warming, climate change, the destruction of our natural world, the exploding world population.

The key to a good night's sleep as a Christian is to do what you can to help so many others - not turning a blind eye or walking by on the other side, but being very aware of the needs of our world and of our local community.

Being a Christian is not simply going to Church on a Sunday morning and saying your prayers and singing the hymns and putting something in the plate as it is passed along the pew – being a follower of Jesus demands making sacrifices for the sake of those around us.

The late Professor William Barclay, eminent Biblical scholar and churchman, was once preaching in a very wealthy church in one of the leafy suburbs of Glasgow. The building was packed to capacity to hear the great man's sermon, and you could hear a pin drop as he preached the Gospel. Then, he announced the last hymn, "When I survey the wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died." "Now, friends," he said, "when you and I reach the words of the last verse this morning,

"Were the whole realm of nature mine

That were an offering far too small –

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all."

Friends, if you don't mean it, please don't sing it!"

Our faith, as Scripture tells us, is to show itself in actions.

My dear wee Mum, who died last year, was one of those generous souls, who, in addition to her own favourite charities, gave to all those causes who sent fliers and letters and appeals through the letter box, and the year before she died, she said that she had had so many requests that she would have to sift through them as her pension would only go so far! From early years, she taught us that as Christians we ought to have a conscience about the world's needs. We cannot solve all the problems but we should not ignore them either.

"Love ever stands with open hands, and while it lives, it gives,

For this is love's prerogative, to give and give and give."

Friends, what happens to us when we leave this world?

I don't know, and neither do you.

But we do know the shape of the story a loving God is writing – if Christ is King, we know that Jesus waits at the end of that story, that He will see us, and know us, and if we have done what He taught us, He will claim us as His own.

Rev. Fraser Aitken.

(Locum Minister).