

The Sheep and the Goats, Christ the King 2017.

Two very wicked men have been in the news this week.

The Butcher of Bosnia, Ratko Mladic, commanded the Bosnian Serb units that two decades shelled Sarajevo and countless other towns and villages, and then in the worst massacre of post 1945 Europe killed 8000 Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica. Thank God, and the International Criminal Court, that Mladic this weekend finally begins his life sentence for genocide. He stands, rightly, accursed. He will, though, probably die peacefully in his bed. His victims did not.

And then there is the Crocodile of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa. He was Robert Mugabe's National Security Minister in the 1980s, commanding the forces which killed thousands of the President's opponents. His troops forced villagers to dance to on the freshly dug graves of their murdered relatives. More recently he masterminded Mugabe's response to losing the first round of the 2008 presidential elections – killing hundreds of opposition supporters. He is not beginning a life sentence. He is being feted as the new President of Zimbabwe. He will not go to prison. He will probably die a rich and powerful man.

Human justice has caught Mladic, and punished him to some extent.

Mnangagwa has got away with it.

The first part of the Gospel this morning is that for both of them, real justice is still coming.

There really is such a thing as Judgement Day, and one day it will arrive.

And on that day Mladic and Mnangagwa will both have to look Jesus Christ in the eye, and account to Him for what they have done. They will have to face their victims and the full horror of their deeds. And Jesus will do justice upon them. We cannot know exactly what that means, but finally the power, the arrogance, and the violence of those men will be stripped from them. And who knows what will be left of them? Perhaps nothing. We cannot know that anyone is damned or lost forever: but equally we cannot assume that they're not. Jesus' words are far too clear for that.

Many Christians think this sounds harsh and judgemental. They think that God is Love, and he loves everyone. And they are right. But it is precisely because He loves so much – loves the dead of Bosnia and Zimbabwe – that there must be fearsome, terrible judgement upon those who murdered them. You don't get to destroy God's children and then waltz into heaven. Despite all the appearances of history, the wicked do not get away with it. One day, there will be a time for justice. That really is Good News.

But, of course, we also will stand before that throne.

And Jesus is very clear about what the key question will be. Not, did you come to church? Did you believe the right things, were you a Christian? But: did you feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, nurse the sick? The focus will be on the thousands and thousands of ordinary chances we had to serve our neighbour. The people in the parable didn't realise it, we don't realise it – but in all those little decisions to care or not, give or not, love or not, that's where we decided our relationship to God and Jesus. Even if God and Jesus never crossed our mind.

Now at one level, this is brilliant news. Your child or partner who doesn't believe, the billions and billions of good, kind, loving people who are not Christians? They are not going to Hell. God is not going to set them a quiz on their religious opinions and damn them for the wrong answers. His Kingdom is going to be jammed full of people with all sorts of opinions – Buddhists, atheists, Hindus and Sikhs and everyone else. All sorts of opinions, but one kind of *character* – a loving, generous character.

But what if my character is not loving or generous enough? How many prisoners have I *not* visited, how many sick have I *not* nursed, how many grieving *not* comforted? Won't Jesus look at me and say: sorry, not quite good enough. Not *nearly* good enough. Away from me, goat, to the pit prepared for the devil and his angels? That kind of anxiety is why you've heard so many sermons say: look, salvation is not about your effort. It's not about you being very good. It's about Jesus, and what He has done. You've probably heard *me* preach that sermon several times. So why this one today?

Well, the truth is that the Bible says both things. It says that salvation is about the kind of life you lead, and that God will reward you according to your works. However, it also says quite rightly that you will never, ever be good enough: that all of us are deeply flawed and broken people, and that thanks be to God that He does *not* give us what we deserve. The Bible says both things.

Can we bring them both together? I think so. Think of it this way. Yes, you can never deserve what God wants to give you. The destiny he has in store for you is so awesome, so glorious, so stupendously *bigger* than you that the idea of you *deserving* it is bizarre. Nothing you could ever accomplish would *merit* what God wants for you. Only God, only Jesus, can make you ready for it. It will always be something given you, something you can only receive. *Salvation's a gift.*

But... this gift can only be received by people who live like a gift. *Who live like a gift.* That is, people who feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, nurse the sick – who give other people things they haven't worked for and don't deserve, just because that's what life's about. Just because they know that the heart of everything is love and gift. Because they're in touch with that heart, in touch – whether they know it or not, whether they use his Name or not - with God. Only the person who lives like a gift, gets the gift. *Salvation's about what you do.*

And if you're worried that you don't do enough – well, you don't. No-one does. There is always more and more love you could give, more and more need you could serve. But God is not looking for you to do it all, or even just a certain amount. He's looking for the direction you're going in, what you're *trying* do. Are you *trying* to be a gift to your neighbour? Never mind how much you've managed or how far you've come, are you at least trying to move in the direction of love and generosity and gift? That's what God is looking for.

And if you are worried you are not moving at all – well: pray, and try. Pray and try, and you will find in fact that you *do* move, that you do become more generous, more loving. None of us is stuck forever. This is the prayer to which Jesus says ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened unto you. He *wants* to fill you with love. He wants to give you what He shall reward you for.

One day, there will be a time for justice. The arrogant, the wicked, the abusers and the killers will get what they deserve. Those who love, no matter why they did it, or what they thought about it, will be rewarded. At the centre of it all is Jesus: perfect wisdom, perfect justice, perfect mercy. We can trust ourselves, and the whole world, to Him: He will get it right. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.