

21/11/2021 - John 5:21-29 - Christ the King - Pastor Fraser Pearce

As human beings, whether we like it or not,
We spend a lot of time and mental energy
Considering how others evaluate us, how they judge us:
How our family, friends, workmates, judge us,
How people on social media, on the street
Or in a crowd judge us.
We spend a lot of time and mental energy
Considering how they judge us on how we look, how we dress,
What we say, where we live, who's in our family,
What we do for a living, where we work, who our friends are
Who we vote for, what team we support... the list goes on.
Whether we like it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not,
We human beings have a deep need to be accepted –
To be accepted *by other human beings*.
We fear that others will judge us negatively:
That we will be rejected, excluded, and forgotten.
What we want, what we need,
Is to find a place in a community where we are acknowledged,
Where we are welcomed, where we are known,
And where we know others.

Today I'm proclaiming Good News from God's word:
The final word of judgement on our lives
Does not belong to our family, friends, workmates,
Or any of the people that we meet now or in the future.
The final word of judgement belongs to Jesus Christ,
The Son of the Father,
Who will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.
It belongs to Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God,
Who gave his life to save us from condemnation.

As we listen to the words of the human being Jesus Christ,
And as we entrust ourselves to the Father who sent him.
We are no longer rejected, excluded, or forgotten.
Instead, we are welcomed into that true human community,
Where we share in the true life of Jesus Christ,
With the brothers and sisters that God gives us.

Let's listen to how today's reading begins: **[Jesus said] Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes.**

Now we're coming into the middle of a narrative here.
What's been happening?
Jesus has healed a physically disabled man.
He has done this on the Sabbath, and when he was challenged on this
He did not back down, but claimed that
He was doing the work of his Father.
This infuriated his persecutors
Who understood that he was making himself equal to God.

What we have in today's reading is a sort of defence:

It starts off as if Jesus is in the dock,
Having to give a reason for his actions.
But as the reading goes on it becomes evident
That it is actually *all people* who are in the dock,
And Jesus who is the true judge of the living and the dead.

In fact, this is how the reading goes on: **The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him.**

Jesus' antagonists wanted to kill him
Because he made himself equal to the Father,
But they didn't know the half of it.
Jesus, in the face murderous opposition,
Claims that he has been appointed by the Father
As the judge of all:
As the one to whom all must give an account of their lives.
It's on the basis on texts like these that the church confesses
That Jesus is the true judge of all.

So, in the Apostles' Creed we confess:
He will come to judge the living and the dead.

In the Nicene Creed we confess:
He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.

In the Athanasian Creed we confess: ***He shall come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people shall arise with their bodies and give an account of their own deeds.***

On the basis of God's word, the church confesses
That whatever personal beliefs, and opinions, and attitudes
We may have about who should be accepted or rejected,
And no matter how powerful some people may appear to be
To make judgements about others in this world,
It is Jesus, born of Mary, born in stable,
It is Jesus, from Nazareth, the carpenter's son,
Who was rejected, spat on,
Stripped, flogged, and crucified.
Who rose from the dead, and sits at the right hand of the Father,
It is Jesus who is the human being
Who has true power and authority to judge us, to judge all.

In our reading Jesus goes on immediately to say
Why his being judge is Good News.
This is what he says: **Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.**

What's going on here?
Well, imagine an ambassador is sent to hostile country.
Bearing a message of peace.
To listen to what the ambassador says,
And to trust in the peaceful intentions
Of the one who sent the ambassador
Is to find an end to hostilities, is to find peace.
But to reject the ambassador: to show dishonour and disrespect,
To doubt the intentions of the one who sent them,
This is to be in conflict, and to invite in death.

This is one way to understand what Jesus is saying.

As we listen to his word of peace,
And as we trust that the Father who sent him wills us good,
We move from conflict with God to peace with God,
We move from being under the power of death,
To being under the authority of the author of life.

And this is not a theory or a pleasant spiritual idea,
It something that we can experience here and now:

This is how Jesus puts it: **‘Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and he has given him authority to execute judgement, because he is the Son of Man.**

Jesus here is evidently speaking about the spiritually dead
About all of us in our natural state.

As we hear the voice of the Son of God,
As we hear the voice of Jesus
We receive the gift of life with God:
A gift that frees us from having to conform our thoughts and words
And actions from the judgement of others.

It’s not those with money, or physical strength or beauty,
Or those with political power,
Whether it is political power in the school yard,
Or in the workplace or in the media,
It’s not with them that true judgement resides.
It is the true human being, Jesus Christ,
Who has the final and authoritative word on our lives.

And his word to us is the word that he spoke to his first disciples
On the night of his resurrection: It is the word of peace.

As we listen to the voice of Jesus
We are free to be generous with others
As God has been generous with us,
To be merciful with others,
As God has been merciful with us,
And to be forgiving toward one another,
As God in Christ has forgiven us.

That this life shows itself in action is evident

From the concluding words of today’s reading: **Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.**

The life that God gives freedom to do good,
It leads us to the resurrection of life.

This is how we confess this teaching in the Athanasian Creed: ***[Jesus] shall come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all people shall arise with their bodies and give an account of their own deeds. Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will go into everlasting fire.***

We need to hear the whole of Jesus’ teaching,
And we need to receive with thoughtful reflection
The creeds that have been handed down to us.

If in our life of faith we show not generosity to those around us;
If we refuse to be merciful to those in need;
And if we hold back from others the forgiveness
That we have so freely received in Christ Jesus,
Then something is terribly wrong.
Then we need to hear the threat that is in the words of Jesus,
And to consider the reality of our spiritual situation,
And to move away from apathy into loving action.

But when we fear, when we rightly fear
What it might mean for us to give an account for the deeds
That we have done, or failed to do, in our real bodily existence,
Our peace can never ultimately come from our good deeds
Or from the approval of any human being
Other than Jesus
The Lamb of God, who has taken away the sin of the world.

Brothers and sisters, look to Jesus, the Lamb of God,
Who has taken away the sins of the world,
Who has taken away your sins.
Listen to his word, and trust the Father who sent him.
In Christ Jesus your God does not will your destruction,
But your salvation,
And he is at hand to give you joy in life
As you mature in Christian love.

Judgement on our lives belongs to no one
Other than our brother, Jesus,
So let us encourage each other to listen to his word,
And to trust the one who sent him,
So that we may live the true life of love for each other
To the glory of God the Father.
In Jesus' name. Amen.