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## **One Love: Practising Five Marks (Matthew 25. 31-46)**

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A few weeks ago, when we explored the mark of hospitality – the first of the five marks of our Benedictus community, we read part of the passage we've just heard. It also happens to be the text set for this last Sunday in the church calendar – the summation of the gospel.

This parable is often referred to as 'The Judgement of the Nations'. I don't take literally its depiction of divinely inflicted and eternal punishment for the unrighteous. But I do take seriously its sense that how we live has consequences; that who we are must be reckoned with. And this understanding that we live in some sense under judgement is not (I think) some strange religious ideology – it's something we know to be true from our ordinary lives.

Take the issue of truth-telling, for example. If we dwell in unreality, if we avoid something about ourselves, about our past or future; if we numb or deceive ourselves, don't we find that sooner or later there's a reckoning? Physically, psychologically, emotionally, relationally – one way or another, the truth we avoid seeks expression, acknowledgement, integration. That's so for whole cultures and societies, as well as for individuals. You can't live against the grain too long, before you start to know about it. Likewise, where there is persistent injustice or oppression – don't the chickens at some point come home to roost? Life cannot endure being diminished, negated, exploited forever. If we poison the earth, if we poison relationships ... we all suffer in the end.

For Jesus, therefore, the fact of this reckoning tells us something about the nature of reality itself. Although, as the bible often complains, the wicked may prosper for a time, ultimately it's those who practise respect, care, compassion, mercy, forgiveness and love whose lives cohere with the deep nature of things. It's these folk, the 'sheep' of the parable, who will find themselves at home in the end

with what has been so 'from the foundation of the world'. A loving orientation to the other reflects the very nature of our Creator. And this is why Jesus can say there is no difference between how we treat one another and how we treat God. The righteous ask, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ... And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'. It's one love. Our way of being here on earth reveals our alignment with and for eternity.

Over the past weeks, we've been exploring the five marks of Benedictus – the practices that express and orient our participation as a contemplative community in this one love. A few people have commented that this series has helped them realise for the first time that our five marks (hospitality, silence, discernment, reconciliation and adventure) aren't just five nice ideas strung together, but are intrinsically connected to each other and mutually deepening.

The practice of hospitality, we've seen, involves a basic disposition of openness and unthreatened-ness. Hospitality doesn't start from fixed notions of who's allowed or how things should be, but is disposed to welcome the other, the stranger, the new. It recognizes that healing and fuller life come not by systematically rejecting or excluding the other, but by befriending and embracing difference, including what we may find difficult in ourselves and one another. Hospitality is a practice of welcome that transforms strangers, wounds and even failure into friends.

Silence enables this practice of radical hospitality. Through the 'silence of the mind', we learn to sit more lightly to our opinions, judgements and obsessions, our habits of complaint, fantasy and self-talk. It's a practice of self-dispossession, self-forgetting, which leads us to be more spacious with others and available for God. It's what makes true communion possible – so silence and hospitality go together.

Discernment, the capacity to live responsively, obediently, from deep listening, flows likewise out of our silence. We can't hear God unless we begin to detach from all the ways we grasp at reality on our own terms, noisily filling up the space with our agenda and demands. Discernment involves a willingness to suspend closure and wait in unknowing – a kind of humility. In a culture so opinionated, so often characterized by arrogant certainty and impatience with vulnerability and waiting, this practice of discernment is profoundly necessary for uncovering the wisdom our world needs.

As we deepen our capacity to listen at this level, we become increasingly participants in Christ's ministry of reconciliation. We learn to attend to the world as Jesus does, seeing things whole, with his mind – and this undergirds the emergence of a genuinely prophetic voice, perceiving and disrupting the false peace that colludes in injustice, while remaining ever committed to the possibility of forgiveness, transformation and reconnection. The more we are drawn into this ministry of reconciliation, the more we recognise God's continuous advent in the life of the world, the draw of God's future. We find ourselves more courageous, daring, willing to give ourselves whole-heartedly and hopefully to the adventure of the life of faith and the fulfilment of promise.

So – five marks – five practices for orienting our life together and for helping us attend to who and how we're to be in the world. Already, I hope, you have a sense of how these marks inform our common life, our worship (our beholding) and prayer; how they show up in our groups and gatherings where we show hospitality to ourselves and others, engage the practice of silence, the work of discernment and reconciliation, and encourage each other in the adventure of our lives. In the last part of this reflection, I wanted to share something of my sense of where the practice of these marks may be inviting us now.

Some of you will remember that when Benedictus entered into a cooperative arrangement with St Ninian's last year, the image that animated our vision was of an outback waterhole. We spoke of our desire to become a place of refreshment and

replenishment, an open sanctuary in the midst of our city. We understood this possibility at several levels. In part, we saw it as involving our own continuing connection to living water. We ourselves are replenished as we worship, meditate and care for one another, and from this fullness we trust that love and peace flow through us as we go out into the world to work and play and care. We hoped also that our 'waterhole' would offer opportunities for people who are not or not yet members of Benedictus to be refreshed as they join us from time to time for meditation in the church or online, as they make use of the website and as the garden is further developed to create that space of sanctuary and stillness in the city. Someone said recently she imagined our site being a 'thin place' – it's beauty and peace, our contemplative presence and prayer witnessing to the divine reality non-anxiously suffusing all of life, and so allowing others to taste it, to rest into it.

And together with all this, I think, the vision of the waterhole invites us to imagine the possibility of opening up new points of access or channels for connection, new offerings that speak to the world's need and in the world's language – whether we are living here in Canberra or further afield. Representations of waterholes by Australian indigenous artists often show them as a series of concentric circles with lines radiating out, radiating in – a sense of the connectedness between the water in the centre and the life around, flowing out and then returning, a living, breathing, mutually enhancing relatedness. As we emerge from being consumed by Covid, as we contemplate what might be possible in the coming year, our Benedictus Council and I are wondering again about this promise of the waterhole as a place of connection, whence the gifts and fruits of contemplative life may be shared with the wider community, and the world's gifts received in turn.

It's always hard to raise this kind of question in a church context without it sounding as though we're talking heavy-handedly about mission. And I guess it is about mission in one sense – but I hope not heavy-handedly, not in a spirit of proselytizing or membership drive or an anxious seeking after relevance. It's simply being aware that we are receiving something – connection with living water – and

we're asked to share what we have, to make it available so that others too may know replenishment, peace, rest, belonging. This sharing of the gifts of contemplation can be offered in a non-religious way. Just as, for example, our Kaleidoscope afternoons offer an opportunity for children and their families to touch into a more spacious place – not proselytizing, but coming out of a contemplative heart without agenda to serve their good and need.

Kaleidoscope was born from Karina's awareness of the gift such a space might offer to those she encountered in the school environment. And I wonder – as you interact with your families or workplaces or neighbourhoods, with people who are stretched or stressed in their work, advocating for justice, frustrated by systems, looking for meaning and purpose; as you attend to your own deep commitments and what brings you joy – what do you notice? What do you hear? And if you let yourself be with what you notice in a contemplative spirit, not solving or fixing what's 'wrong' but simply holding it open before God, what happens then? What stirs within you as a reflection, a response, a wondering, a conversation for possibility you'd like to have?

I have thoughts about things I'd like to explore for next year, things stirring in me as potential offerings connecting to the world around us. Is there something you've been wondering about? Wishing could happen? Wanting to be part of? Let's listen together, let's talk ... and so let us live into our vision to be a waterhole for our thirsty world, to be faithful to our five marks and to that one love – love of God, love of neighbour, love of the earth – which constitutes the truth of us all.