Sermon: **“Come and possess the kingdom”** (Matthew 25.34)

At my presbyter’s training college, 40 years ago, I was told to guard against sermons that were full of ‘should’s! ‘Should’ leads to feelings of guilt for things not done, or done badly – negativity which does not inspire. This does not mean you can never say ‘should’, but like vegemite it is best spread thinly. Nowhere exemplified better than our story.

The parable’s meaning is obvious – we should care for others; hungry, thirsty, as a stranger, naked, sick, in prison. Jesus tells us that all done for these is done for him. This is both reassuring and surprising, because these people did not look like Jesus. If this brings pride it also brings guilt, because we are aware times when we did not act like this. So are we counted as sheep or goats?

The typical preacher will often use the story to urge compassion for those in need.

There are some points to consider:

[1] Looking at the pastoral care within the parish we can see this parable at work. But it is easy to assume that this is *all* the story means, and though v40 uses ‘brothers’ it almost certainly is meant to include *any* human not just church folk.

[2] We can never do enough. There will always be someone we failed to help – forgot, too tired, too busy, didn’t like them enough, or even did not know. We could be constantly on the go and still fail somewhere. So at some level we all are goats. How can this story help us?

[3] A fear of punishment is no good motivation. This is where ‘should’s do not work too well. Fear closes us down, causes us to stop where we are with the tried and trusted, and do nothing new; better would be hope which opens us up, lifts our heads & leads us on, following where Jesus leads.

Back to my college. So how were sermons supposed to be? They are best when full of ‘is’s, describing and explaining how things are, but also bringing hope. So…

[4] The sheep were surprised – what they did was instinctive. When we help instinctively (though sometimes at a cost) don’t we feel great about that help offered? Our motivation is not of fear of punishment if we don’t, but of love because we can.

[5] At best Jesus’ story is about how when this love is in action Jesus is present, or put another way, the God’s Kingdom is present when love is our true motivation. That is precisely what TEXT means. This is not a reward, but a realisation. By acting in love, not fear, we *have* possessed the kingdom!