

# Tuesday 15th December

**Steve Cooper**

## Readings

Jeremiah 23:5-8

**Matthew 21: 28-32**

2 Peter 3:9

*And to those who never listened to the message of Thy birth,  
Who have winter, but no Christmas, bringing them Thy peace on earth,*

### Matthew 21:28-32 - The Parable of the Two Sons (New Revised Standard Version)

‘What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, “Son, go and work in the vineyard today.” He answered, “I will not”; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, “I go, sir”; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Here we are in the middle of Advent. How has it been for you so far? Obviously different, in your preparations you may have to make agonising decisions about whether to visit, or be visited by, family and friends over the Christmas season. The wise or sensible decision may be painful.

The gospel passage today is all about a difficult decision and its consequences. Two brothers, one who feigns obedience to the Father’s request but doesn’t follow it through, the other who initially refuses the request but then changes his mind. This passage is clearly about justice – how the right thing is done not in words or promises, but in responses of love and service. Many of you have supported foodbanks and other food schemes that re-purpose surplus food. Thank you for that. I had my eyes opened a recently behind the scenes at Port Grocery in Ellesmere Port – at the sheer amount of food being passed on by the supermarkets. It is surely wondrous that those in need are able to benefit, yet it struck me as almost obscene that there is so much overstocking in the “ordinary” supermarkets. Magnificent that it is available to alleviate food poverty, but where is food justice.

Our carol today, Cradled in a manger meanly lain the Son of man his head, challenges me deeply. To be honest, I used to read the last verse almost sneering the foolishness of “those who never listened to the message.” But in recent years the later words have come to prominence for me: thing of those “who have winter, but no Christmas, bringing them thy peace on earth.” Where is the justice (both physically and spiritually) to those who have nothing to celebrate this Christmas, who do not understand what is being celebrated? And what will we do about that?

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Cradled in a manger, meanly, laid the Son of Man His head;  
Sleeping His first earthly slumber where the oxen had been  
fed.

Happy were those shepherds listening to the holy angel's  
word;  
Happy they within that stable worshipping their infant Lord.

Happy all who hear the message of His coming from above;  
Happier still who hail His coming, and with praises greet His  
love.

Blessèd Saviour, Christ most holy, in a manger Thou didst  
rest;  
Canst Thou stoop again, yet lower, and abide within my  
breast?

Evil things are there before Thee; in the heart, where they  
have fed,  
Wilt Thou pitifully enter, Son of Man, and lay Thy head?  
Enter, then, O Christ most holy; make a Christmas in my  
heart;  
Make a heaven of my manger: it is heaven where Thou art.

And to those who never listened to the message  
of Thy birth,  
Who have winter, but no Christmas, bringing them  
Thy peace on earth,  
Send to these the joyful tidings; by all people, in  
each home,  
Be there heard the Christmas anthem; Praise to  
God, the Christ has come!

### Prayer

Loving and gracious God, in your incarnation you came into your  
world for all humanity.

We have had the privilege of experiencing you, and know what  
Christmas is really about.

Save us from any pride in that knowledge.

May we stand in the shoes of those who are yet to know your  
love and grace, that in this season you may surprise us anew in  
your presence with you people.

May we stand in the shoes of those who face this season in anx-  
iety or fear, those who cannot "serve up" society's expectations  
or their family's desires and understand anew just how dramatic  
your incarnation is for us all.

May we stand in the humility of the stable and find anew the  
king of peace and justice. Amen.

Cradled in a Manger Meanly  
[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=ASHzJKxfZA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASHzJKxfZA)

We pray for those who rush  
around unable to be still be-  
cause of the demands of  
others. Grant them peace.

We pray and give thanks for  
who have pointed us to Jesus.

We pray for  
opportunities of revealing  
Christ's love to others.



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