

Mountains of Matthew : Clare Amos at the Commissioning of Readers in the Diocese of Southwark, Southwark Cathedral, 26th January 2008

There was once a famous discussion between William Temple and Charles Gore, both great figures in the life of the Church of England in the first half of the twentieth century.. Gore reflected that when he encountered the writings of St Paul he felt immediately 'at home' – but when he engaged with St John it was as though he was visiting a foreign country. William Temple commented that for him it was precisely the opposite. John was 'home' – but Paul rather strange and uncharted territory.

Bishop Tom Wright retells that story in his little book 'Following Jesus' and then goes on to add that on that issue he is with Gore. Like Gore he feels at home with Paul – but as for John, Bishop Tom draws an analogy with his wife. He says, 'I love her very much, but I don't claim to understand her'. That, he says, is how he feels about the Gospel of John!

As for me – I am definitely with William Temple. I am absolutely a John person rather than a Paul person. I wonder what that says about my husband?

Strictly speaking however I am not just a John person. I am also a Mark person – and when I am in certain moods I can also be a Luke person. Up till recently, however, I have not really been a Matthew person. So why, apart from my innate masochism, have I chosen in this talk today to focus on Matthew's Gospel – with a title that I selected myself of 'Surveying Reader Ministry: the view from Matthew's mountains?'

I suspect that Matthew's is a Gospel that needs a fair amount of PR at the beginning of the 21st century. The new focus on Mark's Gospel during the twentieth century led to a corresponding decrease of interest in Matthew. It was during the first part of the 20th century that the consensus of biblical scholarship moved to accepting that Mark was the first of the Gospels. When you added Mark's newfound priority to the way the Gospel seemed to speak to the spirit of the age, the pain of world wars, the horror of Auschwitz, and the questioning of authority which marked the 1960s onward Mark began to challenge the preeminent position that Matthew had enjoyed for centuries as the 'Church's Gospel'. By contrast the Gospel of Matthew seems to some to reflect a different age: a time when people had time – and were prepared to listen – to the 'experts', when the church was powerful and could expect due deference, when certainties were popular and when authority (of all sorts) did not expect to be questioned or held to account. My friend Angela Tilby wrote a fairly sharp reflection on Matthew's Gospel which concluded with the sentence. 'Matthew lays the foundations for a Church sanctioned morality which has been enormously influential, creative and damaging.' And she pithily summed up Matthew by describing it as 'an authoritative gospel, a gospel for popes, prelates and priests.' For popes, prelates and priests – but is it also a Gospel for Readers?

It is interesting for example to compare the BCP Sunday lectionary with that found in the ASB – which was devised in the 1970s. In the BCP Matthew is used more or less as the default Gospel – whereas in the ASB although there is still a reasonable range of material used from Matthew, Mark has become more prominent, and actually the Gospel that is used the most extensively is that of John. But now with Common Worship we have moved on to use the Revised Common Lectionary – with one of its important features being that each of the three synoptic gospels is explored for a year in turn. Perhaps therefore, especially as we are now in the RCL's year of Matthew, it is time to revisit Matthew, and, looking at it with fresh eyes, rediscover for our age the wisdom it has to offer. Not least one or two slightly surprising and even subversive twists.

In fact when I was confirmed – years ago now – the bishop who conducted the service commented in his sermon that in the apparently innocuous genealogy with which Matthew's Gospel begins we can find the very heart of the radical Christian good news. He enlarged on his comment by pointing out how the neat orderly progression of male names, organised as three times fourteen generations, is occasionally interrupted by references to four women. And what women – Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, and the wife of Uriah. All probably considered to be Gentiles – and all involved in sexual shenanigans of one sort or another! What fore-mothers for what a Messiah!

The point the bishop was making has been put wittily into verse by a biblical scholar:

Exceedingly odd,
 Is the means by which God
 Has provided our path to the heavenly shore:
 Of the girls from whose line
 The true light was to shine
 There was one an adulteress, one was a whore.
 There was Tamar who bore –
 What we all should deplore –
 A fine pair of twins to her father-in-law;
 And Rahab the harlot,
 Her sins were as scarlet,
 As red as the thread which she hung from the door;
 Yet alone of her nation
 She came to salvation,
 And lived to be mother of Boaz of yore;
 And he married Ruth,
 A Gentile uncouth,
 In a manner quite counter to biblical law;
 And of her there did spring
 Blessed David the King
 who walked on his palace one evening, and saw
 The wife of Uriah,
 From whom he did sire
 A baby that died, oh, and princes a score.
 And a mother unmarried
 It was too that carried
 God's son, and him laid in a cradle of straw,
 That the moral might wait
 At the heavenly gate
 While the sinners and publicans go in before,
 Who have not earned their place
 But received it by grace,
 And have found them a righteousness not of the Law.
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But as Rowan Williams comments in 'Christianity on Trial' it is even possible to wonder if Matthew is subverting his subversion. Is this, as Archbishop Rowan puts it one 'enormous divine joke' – for since the genealogy is actually that of Joseph strictly speaking it is irrelevant to the birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary, even though Mary's pregnant and apparently scandalous situation does of course put her precisely in the line of fore-mothers such as Tamar, Ruth, Rahab and Bathsheba.

All this is of course an hors d'oeuvre to the essential point with which Matthew draws his first chapter to a close: 'You shall call his name Emmanuel' Joseph and Mary are told – which being interpreted means 'God with us'. In my view this is the key message of the Gospel that Matthew wants to share with us – that in the life, ministry death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God is with us. Critically it is a point that he not only makes here at the beginning of his Gospel – he also repeats it at the very end, for the last words of the resurrected Jesus as he bids his disciples farewell from the mountain-top are, 'Remember *I am with you* always to the end of the age. Matthew is telling us that the whole of his Gospel is held together by this truth which undergirds and gives meaning to all else: that God is with us. This Gospel explores different kind of relationships with considerable depth, relationships in family, church and community. But grounding them all is this prior relationship which must alter how we view all our other relationships. Because God is with us, 'things can never ever be the same.' Everything we are and do must be seen in this light. It is Jesus' final message to us in this Gospel. And – given that this is a message shared with his disciples on the mountain where he commissions them for mission, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit', and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you' – it is also, I would suggest a

message that he wants us, his disciples today, to share with those to whom *we* are sent. Sometimes, of course, it is not quite so easy to realize this when we descend from the clear air of the mountain-top to the murkier atmosphere of the valley or plain below. But I like to think of days like today as opportunities for all of us to stand for a moment on a metaphorical mountain-top to get our bearings once again before we plunge back into the hustle of our everyday lives. So what can we discover as we survey the view from Matthew's mountains?

The first thing to say is that there are a lot of them! As well as the mountain of mission in Matthew 28 to which we have already alluded and to which we will return – there are five – or perhaps six or seven – other mountain-top experiences that Jesus has in Matthew's Gospel: the mountain of temptation, the mountain of the Sermon on the Mount, the comparatively little-known mountain of Matthew 15 where Jesus heals and feeds people, the mountain of transfiguration, the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem which features in either one, two or three episodes of Holy Week. Mountains are clearly important for Matthew – more so than any other Gospel writer. It is, I am sure, partly linked to his desire to draw connections with the Old Testament, and in particular the experience of Moses. The mountains in Matthew's Gospel deliberately remind us of Mount Sinai and possibly also Mount Zion: yet they also provide us with a springboard to appreciate the striking newness of the message and ministry of Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel mountains are places 'where the kingdom of heaven breaks into human history through incarnation, through Jesus' preaching, teaching and healing.' (Jacques Matthey) And in their multi-faceted nature they also offer a creative way into an exploration of some of the many aspects and facets of ministry – in this particular case, Reader ministry.

The first mountain is of course a particularly painful mountain to climb. But with Lent coming up we cannot circumvent the mountain of temptation. And the story of mountains and ministry really does begin here. Although both Matthew and Luke refer to three temptations of Jesus it is interestingly only in Matthew – 4.1-11 – that 'a high mountain' is specifically mentioned'. It is also significant that the order of the temptations in Matthew is different to that found in Luke. By concluding with this mountain-top experience in which the devil offers Jesus 'all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them' in return for worshipping him, Matthew has emphasized its place in Matthew's schema.. This mountain-top temptation comes after two earlier temptations of Jesus – to turn stones into bread to feed his own hunger, and to perform dare-devil feats to force God to act to save him. Martin Baddeley, well known to a number of you, once preached a sermon in which he suggested that the three temptations are actually effectively the temptations of ministry. He was making a valuable point. It can become a temptation of ministry to think that all depends on us, that it our task is to meet every need, or certainly our own. It can become a temptation of ministry to engage in deliberately 'risky' behaviour in the belief that we are invulnerable. Not that risk is necessarily wrong – for risk is built into the fabric of the Christian life - but behaving in an irresponsible way in the belief that somehow we warrant special divine protection seems to me to be highly questionable. And it can certainly become a temptation of ministry to attempt to stand on a mountain-peak, seeking power and control of all below in a way that avoids the suffering of the cross or does not allow those to whom we minister their legitimate freedom. Some of these temptations, I dare to say, are more characteristic of ordained – rather than Reader – ministry but they are definite challenges that all of us who have roles in the life of the church need to take account of.

I certainly think that we need to ensure that we have questioned ourselves – and our motives – on the mountain of temptation before we reach the next mountain in Matthew's Gospel, a place I suspect where many Readers, because of the particular nature of their calling feel especially at home. If people know of only one mountain in Matthew's Gospel it is likely to be this one – the mountain of preaching and teaching, where Jesus offered his 'Sermon on the Mount'. It is one of the points in the Gospel where the links between Jesus and Moses become crystal clear. We cannot fully understand what is happening here unless we take account of what took place on Mount Sinai during the Exodus, and make connections with more extensive traditions about the importance of mountains found in the Old Testament.

Throughout the history of religions mountains have been places which have expressed in a very powerful way the possibility of humanity meeting God. Such symbolism is of course very understandable given the cosmology of the ancient world – quite literally a mountain was a place where human beings could feel 'nearer my God to thee, nearer to thee.' But even today there are few people who do not feel a special awe or sense of frisson at the sight of a high mountain. It challenges us to become more aware of our own comparative insignificance and littleness, and from the top of it we can see reality in a different and perhaps clearer light. You do dare for a

moment to believe that the boundaries between earth and heaven might be tissue-thin, and here for a moment it could even be possible for us to see God face to face. So this mountain-top in Matthew enables us to see more clearly just who Jesus is. He is Moses but much more than Moses Unlike Moses he is not simply the messenger of the commandments, for by interposing the divine 'I' which tolls like a bell through much of the Sermon he is reminding us that he is not simply a messenger – but the actual locus of divine-human revelation. As Martin Buber put it, 'Jesus is not content with Sinai, he wants to penetrate the cloud above the mountain from which the voice resounds; he wants to penetrate the primal purpose of God.' Alternatively we could say that there is a sense in which he even becomes the mountain in his own person. But what does that in turn mean for us?

I have quite an ambiguous feeling about the film the 'Life of Brian.' Some parts of it I dislike intensely – other sections I feel ought to be compulsory viewing for those who value institutional conformity, whether political or religious, above human freedom. But there is one small segment which never fails to make me chuckle. It is early in the film, and Jesus – and it is the figure of Jesus not Brian – is speaking to a vast crowd from a mountain-top. It is obviously intended to be a representation of the Sermon on the Mount. Right at the back of the crowd there is a man who cannot quite hear properly what Jesus is saying. Instead of 'Blessed is the meek' – one of the Beatitudes with which Jesus opens his sermon – he hears it as 'Blessed is the Greek' – and he starts puzzling aloud why it is that the Greeks should be so specially blessed! This sense of Jesus speaking to a large crowd – some of whom may only be able to part hear what he is saying – fits in with most peoples' imaginary mental picture of what the Sermon on the Mount might have looked like, with Jesus using the mountain top as a pulpit to address the large crowds that have followed him there. But this it isn't quite what we are told in Matthew 5.1. For there it says: 'When Jesus saw the crowds he went up the mountain and after he sat down his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak and taught them.' The 'them' apparently refers to Jesus' inner group of disciples and it is they who are the primary audience for his words. And that is reinforced by the way in which following the Beatitudes Jesus seems clearly to speak directly to his disciples: Blessed are you when people persecute and revile you...on my account.' And yet at the end of chapter 7 as the sermon draws to a close we hear, 'Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority' and this seemingly is referring to a much wider group. How can we hold together these two different perceptions?' There is I believe here in Matthew a dialectic between the inner church circle and the wider community. If we take the Beatitudes as an example they are first of all words addressed to Jesus' friends and disciples, but at the same time you feel that Jesus is also taking a glance over the disciples' shoulders – looking at the crowds streaming out beyond. So what the Beatitudes are in effect is a challenge to disciples, but a challenge to live in such a way that they make a real difference to that wider community in that wider world. It is no accident that in the Sermon on the Mount the Beatitudes are immediately followed by Jesus' words about the need for his disciples to become salt and light in the world. Indeed it is interesting to note that in Jesus' comment about 'light' he draws specifically on the image of a mountain or hill – 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.' It is as though Jesus has taken his disciples up to this special place on this mountain – not to segregate them from others but rather so that they can catch fire from him and become in turn a visible and focal point drawing others through them to him. What might this mean in terms of the core Reader ministry to which Bishop Tom today will re-license you, as preachers and teachers? Perhaps it is a helpful reminder that you are in a special way liminal people, people on the boundary. Your task is to help to keep open the doors of conversation between those who identify themselves as part of the gathered church and those beyond, streaming out down the hill, whether they be interested enquirers, or simply the wider community. Your vocation is in a real sense to help to light the lamp and savour the dish, so that the Christian community you serve can indeed be light and salt in the world. And is this perhaps a task particularly to bear in mind in your ministry of preaching and teaching?

There is of course far more that could be said about the Sermon on the Mount and the ministry of preaching and teaching, but we still have several more hills to climb so we must press on.

Our next mountain often escapes notice – but it is definitely there in Matthew's Gospel. And this missed mountain has some very important things to tell us about both ministry and mission. For in Matthew 15.29 we read that after Jesus had left Tyre and Sidon – where he had healed the daughter of a Canaanite woman, 'he passed along the Sea of Galilee and he went up the mountain where he sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, so that whole crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame

walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.’ Then immediately after this we are told how Jesus has compassion on the hungry crowd, and feeds them, all 4000 of them with only seven loaves. The account of the feeding of the 4000 is of course there in Mark – but Mark has no mention of it taking place on a mountain, nor does he tell us about that motley crew who struggle up the mountain to reach Jesus. Those details are in Matthew alone. So for Matthew this mountain is the place of both healing and feeding. I find Matthew’s description of the raggle-taggle multitude immensely powerful – the way he tells it it feels almost as though the able-bodied are only allowed to be present if they are accompanying someone who needs healing – completely inverting the normal order of society in which people with disability were merely tolerated at best, but frequently simply excluded. Both aspects of the story, the healing and the feeding, powerfully illustrate Jesus’ compassion – but there is much more to it even than that. It is a sign of the new age. I am sure that we are intended to make connections with a mountain referred to in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. Isaiah looks to the future and speaks of a mountain where ‘the Lord of hosts will make a feast for all peoples, a feast of rich food, of well aged-wines. The prophet goes on to tell how on this mountain God would swallow up tears and death for ever. It would be a place where people would praise the Lord for whom they had waited so long and where they would rejoice in his salvation. Isaiah is speaking of the long-expected Messianic banquet which would inaugurate the kingdom of God. And Matthew is telling us that that is exactly what is now happening on this mountain – and that all and especially the Gentiles and those with disabilities are welcome to be fed at God’s table. Indeed it is perhaps precisely because of the willingness of these people to seek healing and feeding, that the mission of Jesus can extend its boundaries, and move beyond the parameters of Jesus’ fellow Jews to which it had up till then largely been confined. God’s new way of dealing with people has begun – and even though it is on a mountain-top, he has started not with the top of society, but with society’s lowest ranks. It is they who will have the prime seats at this banquet.

For Readers, and others engaged in ministry, I believe that this episode offers us an important message. So often, though we consider ‘works of compassion’, healing and feeding as important, we regard them as a kind of ministerial spin-off or add-on to the real work of ministry – our preaching and teaching of the Gospel. Not so, says Matthew. Rather it is actually through such works as these that the kingdom of God is being made present among us so their theological currency is incalculable – and we literally cannot afford to regard them in any lesser light.

It is time for a moment of rest. Where better than on the mountain of transfiguration, even though it is quite a climb? Along with the mountain of temptation, this mountain of transfiguration is the only mountain in the Gospel specifically described as ‘high’. There are other verbal links too – in both cases the expression ‘fall down’ is used: in the temptation when the devil asks Jesus to fall down and worship him, in the transfiguration when the disciples fall down before Jesus. On both mountain-tops the issue of what it means for Jesus to be Son of God is wrestled with and teased out. It is as though the mountains of the Gospel are creating echoes which reverberate across the valleys and plains of the rest of this biblical book. The echoes look forward into Jesus’ future as well as back into his past. As I mentioned in an article I wrote for the last issue of *The Reader* which I edited, Jesus’ glory on the mountain of transfiguration contrasts vividly and deliberately with the agony of his experience on the Mount of Olives, in the garden of Gethsemane. The startling light of his transfiguration is cast into the deep shadow of his bitter night. Yet the two experiences have to be understood alongside each other – the validity of the authority of the Son commissioned on the mountain-top is finally ratified by the obedience he offers to his father in Gethsemane, ‘Father, let this cup pass from me – but not my will but yours be done.’

It a very literal sense the story of the mountain of the transfiguration lies at the middle – the heart – of the Gospel. More intensely than in any other of Jesus’ experiences on a mountain it presents Jesus as the bridge or intersection between earth and heaven. It takes us aside – like Jesus took his three closest disciples aside – for at least a brief space of time and invites us to see reality as it truly is and ‘to encounter a majestic, incarnate crucified God as the only source of hope for the transfiguring of a disfigured world.’ (Dorothy Lee) Through its symbolism and space this mountain reminds us that it is both our duty and our joy to spend time nurturing the life of our own spirit – or in some cases, such as Readers with ministries in the area of spiritual direction – helping to develop the spiritual lives of others. And if any mountain is going to transform us – it surely ought to be this one. Trevor Dennis has an exquisite meditation on ‘transfiguration’. He concludes as follows: ‘Do such moments change us? Were the disciples themselves transfigured? Golgotha does not say so for then Peter and James and John were nowhere to be seen. But that’s it often is with the holy. Too often we insist on returning to

our blind stupidity. Too often we prefer crucifying God to being true to what we have seen and felt and touched. Yet sometimes – others notice it first – through the persistent grace of God, we are changed a little and borrow something of his glory.’

Sadly however we must not make Peter’s mistake and seek to remain on this mountain-top, by building Jesus – and ourselves – a nice comfortable house away from the noise and bustle of humanity. It is back down to the plain and then the long slow steady climb up to Jerusalem, where we will crest the Mount of Olives finally to enter the city. Three times in the events of the last week of Jesus’ life the Mount of Olives is mentioned. The first time during his triumphal entry into the city, heralded as ‘Son of David’ – which is then immediately followed by his cleansing of the temple. The second comes in the introduction to Jesus’ long speech about the future in 24 and 25 which we are told was given on the Mount of Olives, and the third time that this mountain is referred to is, we have already mentioned, as the place of Jesus’ betrayal. What links Jesus’ experiences on this mountain and what can we learn from them as pointers for our own ministries? It is perhaps this. The Mount of Olives symbolizes the place from which Jesus refuses to withdraw, where he insisting on engaging with and challenging the dangerous and oppressive political realities of his day – as reflected in his triumphal entry followed by his actions in the temple. Tellingly it is also the place from which he predicts the destruction of the temple, and the future judgement of the nations. And finally it is the place where through his arrest which takes place on this mountain he pays the price for his refusal to seek his own safety in spite of the hostility that his engagement had engendered. And there is no escaping the fact that the Gospels suggest that such a responsibility to challenge an unjust status quo may also be the task of at least some of Jesus’ followers, and particularly those who minister in his name. Ministry sometimes needs to get its hands dirty in the grit of our society – and when it does it can sometimes prove dangerous. This mountain leads directly to the cross.

And it is only if we are prepared to travel that road with Jesus that we are able finally to journey with him once more to Galilee to the mountain with which the Gospel draws to its conclusion – the mountain we referred to at the very start of our travels today, where Jesus commissions his disciples for mission, and promises to be *with us* to the end of time. As we said then, Jesus tells them – us – ‘to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you’. It is interesting that the recent Church of England report on the theology of ministry – in general – not specifically on Reader ministry – that is a different report which is still in progress – chooses to take these verses at the end of Matthew 28 as offering a summary which encompasses the whole of the church’s ministry. The report connects making disciples to the pastoral dimension of ministry, baptizing to its sacramental dimension, and teaching – to the ministry of the word. The report then develops its analysis of the various aspects of the Church[s] ministry, both ordained and lay, starting from this basis. Although not totally convincing I find it an interesting suggestion. The point I want to share with you however is slightly different and it relates to the comparison and contrast between Jesus’ experience on this mountain, the last in Matthew’s Gospel, and the mount of temptation, the Gospel’s first. For here in Matthew 28, on the mountain of commissioning the disciples for mission all the threads woven into the fabric of Matthew, from chapter 1 onwards are drawn together. Quite a number of biblical scholars how there are pointed and detailed linguistic parallels between Jesus’ experience on the mountain of temptation and this mountain of mission. In both cases the nature of power is clearly a key question. In both cases there is a universal thrust indicated by the word ‘all’ and in both cases the word for ‘worship’ is used. These parallels seem to be deliberate, and pointing to contrasting understandings of Jesus’ mission and ministry as the Son of God. On one mountain Jesus- and perhaps we – are being offered the devil’s method: rule from above, by political force if necessary, dominate all the kingdoms of the world. If he chose that way Jesus could impose God’s kingdom and justice by means of political power and avoid the scandal of the cross. But that was not the way for which Jesus opted. So instead there were those other mountains to climb where Jesus taught and prayed and healed – and eventually there was the cross itself to climb on. And it isn’t until all this has happened that we can finally arrive at this last mountain – where another alternative strategy for mission and ministry is offered. On this mountain the disciples –a and we – are being commissioned for ministry and mission – remarkably some of them, and us, still fearful and doubting, and sent out for their work with the promise ‘I am with you’ resounding in their ears. So the mission of Jesus is to reveal and embody God’s kingdom by reigning not ‘from above’ as the devil suggested, but as ‘Emmanuel’ , the crucified and risen one who is ‘I am with you’. And what in turn does that mean for us in our mission and ministry. I cannot do better than quote from Jacques Matthey, a great and gentle Swiss pastor who is responsible for the mission work of the WCC. Jacques writes:

‘Because God has chosen this way (God-with-us-in-Jesus-Christ) to be incarnated, to be present among people, to reign, he will only reach all Gentile nations if disciples reach them and if Christian communities live there in clear reference to the Nazarene and his teaching. This is what Matthew 28.16-20 expresses. But he will only reach the nations if the bearers of the Gospel of the kingdom, the evangelising disciples, come as poor, exposed, defenceless men and women, [themselves] living *with* and not above those to whom they bring healing.

I do believe – and it is part of my commitment to your ministry as Readers – that as lay ministers of the Gospel you have the ability to live in a special way with and not above those to and with whom you minister. As we have panted our way in the last hour up and down Matthew’s many mountains we have touched upon different facets of ministry – and for some of you different facets may be more significant than others – whether it be teaching and preaching, the ministry of compassion, or indeed the ministry of prayer. But this vocation – to follow in the steps of Emmanuel and live *with* those to whom you minister surely belongs to you all.

And there is one final radical twist in Matthew’s tale – which perhaps parallels the twist with which the Gospel opened.

Jesus, ‘Emmanuel’, promises to be *with* his disciples throughout all time. But where can we find and see him today? Matthew himself directly and explicitly provides the startling – and shocking? – answer. For in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25 we discover that we are being offered the opportunity to see Jesus in some very unlikely places – in the faces of the sick, the strangers, the hungry and thirsty, the imprisoned whom the disciples of Jesus may choose – or refuse – to honour or minister to. ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, or naked or a stranger or in prison? ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did to the least of my brothers and sisters – so you did it to me.’

This is the treasure, the mystery, that awaits us at the end of the many mountains of Matthew.