

Sermon Christ the King A
All Saints, Mt. Pleasant
Rev. Ginger Litman-Koon
November 22, 2020

Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘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 when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 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.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

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One final day. One last Sunday to sum up what the entire rest of the Church Year was supposedly all about. Christ the King Sunday has the final say on what has passed and what is to come. Next week, believe it or not, we’ll begin the season of Advent. A new Church Year will have begun. And so today we have one last chance to lift up What last year - Advent through Pentecost - was all about. And this is it: Jesus is Lord.

On Christ the King Sunday, we lift up the resounding acclamation that Jesus Christ is Lord. That he alone reigns. Not Caesar, not Herod, not politics, nor economics, nor pressures, oppressors, powers or principalities. Jesus Christ is King. It’s appropriate that this comes every November, just weeks after Election Day. The reminder that no matter who is in power in this or any other country in the world, that for those who call upon his name, Christ alone reigns supreme. Above all else, no matter what party we’re affiliated or who we voted for, we as Christians pledge allegiance to God’s reign through Christ in this world and the next. We pledge allegiance to this invisible Kingdom of God that exists within and around each and every one of us that manifests itself where two or three are gathered in his name and where the least of these are considered and cared for.

The kingdom of God exists wherever Servants of Christ proclaim in word - or more importantly in deed - that Jesus Christ is Lord. For many around the world right now, it may be hard to see the Kingdom at work and active in their midst. In a world where people are hurting, people are dying, where “How are we going to celebrate Thanksgiving this year?” is the least of our worries, when our neighbors are wondering, “Will I find something to eat today?” “Where will my family sleep tonight?” or “Will this be the last I see my loved one alive?” For many, it may be hard to look around and see any evidence that “Jesus Christ is Lord” In fact, the crises upon crises facing many this winter may have many facing physiological and spiritual tipping points, where they wonder if there is even a God at all.

This Christ the King Sunday, this is the world into which we are called not only to see but to BE the presence of the Kingdom of God. We are called to live out the King’s orders to feed the hungry and provide for the thirsty and clothe the naked and remember the imprisoned. This season, the numbers of those who’d be considered the “least of these” are growing and expanding to include hard-working citizens who never thought they’d find themselves unemployed or behind on bills or facing eviction or fearing homelessness. This season, the presence of the Kingdom is needed desperately in every corner of this world.

In today’s reading from Matthew 25, Jesus describes Kingdom Living. And he describes it in way Professor Dirk Lange has termed “living in the spirit of the Beatitudes.” Living solidarity with the meek and powerless, embodying care for the hurting and the hungry, all the while risking ridicule or persecution for the works of righteousness done for Jesus’ sake. In this gospel passage, the King calls to his right-hand side those who have been engaging in this spirit of the Beatitudes, and the interesting thing, Professor Lange points out, is that they didn’t even realize they were doing it. “Lord, when did we” do all these things?, they ask. Those who have been living into the inheritance of the Master weren’t doing the work of God in order to be rewarded. they were simply responding in mercy to the needs they saw all around them.

You could call that kind of behavior “a holy ignorance,” Lange continues. “These were people who had entered the joy of their master without even knowing it. Such participation is not self-evident. The joy they knew was not complete; it was mixed with suffering, danger, risk, tribulations and most likely many disappointments. And yet, it was joy. They acted out of mercy. They went the way of the cross.” Those who were living out the reign of Christ were the ones who saw through his eyes. They recognized the hungry, the homeless and the hurting in their midst and they allowed the mercy of the crucified Christ to work through them for the healing of the beloved of God.

Society is faced with such enormous challenges this year. Almost none of the needs present in our communities have gotten better this year. And so it may feel very daunting to face these needs head-on as we hear Christ calling us to do today. But let’s hear the specific responses Jesus lifts up in Matthew 25: He says, “I was hungry and you gave me food.” He doesn’t say, “you ended world hunger.” He says, “you gave me food.” He says, “I was sick and you took care of me. Not, “you cured cancer,” but “you took care of me.” All it takes to be the presence of Christ’s Kingdom in this world is one step - one action - one kindness for someone who is hungry, thirsty, hurting, lonely, imprisoned, ill or depressed. One kindness at a time, one step at a time, the world will see - through us - that indeed Jesus Christ is Lord.

Jesus recognized even in the 1st Century that the injustices of this world are very deeply entrenched and will not be solved overnight. He knows that for some, true healing and true justice will

only be found after they depart this broken world. But Jesus also acknowledges for us today that each and every one of us can do *something* to help *someone* who is hurting, hungry or imprisoned.

So how are we doing? As a congregation, how are we doing? How are we manifesting the Kingdom of God in our midst and for those in our community. As individuals or families, how are we doing? How are our lives reflecting the truth that above all else, Jesus Christ is Lord? If we want to know how we're doing, Jesus would say, we have to look no farther than to see how our own neighbors are doing. Are they being fed? Are they being clothed? Are they being cared for, checked on, remembered, prayed for?

If you stay up to date on our All Saints church news, you see the things that our congregation is doing to meet the increasing need we recognize in our neighbors right now. But what you may not hear are all the personal stories of the ways you are helping neighbors in need all around you. I hear them. As your pastors, Kris and I hear the stories of the ways you are reaching out to your neighbors, to your coworkers, to local and national charities. You'd never notice it, but there's a lot of "secret service" around here, so to speak!

I have to brag on some people whose "secret service" to their neighbors truly warms my heart. It's our members who live in senior living facilities. Grace, for example. Grace truly lives up to her name every day when she gently comforts, guides and reassures her roommate who is in advance stages of dementia and wakes up everyday wondering where she is. Or Adele, who takes every opportunity to care for her neighbors down the hall, bringing them food from the hall parties if they are unable to go out, taking the opportunity to ask them how they're doing, and then witnessing to them about her deep and joyful faith. Or Dorothy, who, when she knew the pastors were coming for a visit, would always go find her neighbor Dot, to invite her to come in and receive Communion along with her.

Although they are dealing with the restrictions and loss of independence that often comes with leaving home and entering a residential facility, I have to tell you, these eldest Saints of ours are truly "living in the spirit of the Beatitudes" each and every day. If they can do it, we can do it. We can do the everyday acts of mercy our Lord invites us into on behalf of the "least of these who are members of his family."

On this last Sunday of a year that has definitely been one for the history books, Let us say with confidence that above all, no matter what we've endured, what distracted us or tried to bring us down, that we can stand strong today and say with confidence - with our words and with our acts of mercy - that Jesus Christ is Lord!