

Sermon from 11-20

The Sunday of Christ the King

Our first lesson comes before our worship begins. It is a reflection on Christ the King. The scriptures for the three years of the lectionary **do not** portray a worldly king. They include Luke's account of Jesus on the cross, labeled the King of the Jews, and the thief saying, "remember me, when you come into your kingdom." (Luke 23:33-43), John's account of Jesus before Pilate being asked "Are you a King?" and this morning's Matthew passage of Jesus as the King in judgement over all the nations of the world. None of these passages are about Kingly glory. The only passage which talks about Kingly power, the power of judgement, the passage for this morning, actually focuses on the question of the ethics and faithfulness of people in the world. It asks, "how do we live?"

We follow a King. But **not** like a King in this world.

Matt. 25:31-46

"A Fundamental Expectation"

Our journey in these recent weeks has been a seamless approach to Christ's coming. Advent. But advent is always more than Christmas. Advent is also the Second Coming. Judgement day and the settling of accounts. So, we have seen the parables of the maidens and their lamps (preparations), We have seen the parable of the talents (preparation-enactment), and this morning we see the REAL settling of accounts – Judgement day. But the abiding message is accounts are kept. We are accountable to God.

In the picture (on the screen) you see Saint Michael with two people – IN THE SCALES – being measured. But what is the standard of measure? The standard of measure is what God requires of us: right relationship. Right relationship is expressed in the catalog of how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, those in prison. But to better show you this expectation lets step out of the gospel of Matthew and over to the gospel of Luke. (Please note that it is dangerous scholarship to cross gospels but in this case it shows the point.) The Parable of Lazarus. (Luke 16:19-31) This is not the Lazarus who is raised from the dead, but Lazarus who is begging at the gate. Lazarus and the rich man. (Who has purple and fine linen). When Lazarus and the rich man die, Lazarus goes to Abraham's bosom and the rich man goes to the fires of hell. **Because** the rich man never gave a thought to Lazarus in his suffering. The story plays out with the rich man hoping to come back from the dead to warn his brothers. But the story concludes – if your brothers can't figure out their obligation from Moses and the prophets, it wouldn't matter if someone came back from the dead!

There is a fundamental expectation which was a part of the Old Testament tradition – **be a neighbor to your neighbor**. Earlier the choir sang Micah's summary : What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

Justice isn't court cases. It is the way we live our relationships fairly. And loving kindness has nothing to do with "kindness". Loving kindness is the translation of the Hebrew term Hesed, which is the covenant obligation (great commandment) to LOVE GOD AND LOVE NEIGHBOR.

This brings us to the first unusual point of today's lesson. We commonly talk about faith as if it is what you believe. But this story makes clear that belief is **not sufficient**.

This contradicts Paul's preaching. And stands against the major accomplishment of the Reformation - "That we are saved by faith" (and not by works) .

This passage makes clear that God has an expectation –(as John the Baptist will phrase it two weeks from now) – that your life (in faith) should benefit repentance. That is: faith should make a difference in your living. Faith has consequences : in faith we SEE that we are stewards of everything that God has entrusted. And that is all of life. But the more so – that God expects our relationships to look like (faithful)relationships.

Now there is one more point, and this is the scary one. (Because Hell is at stake). This passage says that it matters not just what you do, not just what you did. It matters **WHAT YOU DIDN'T DO!** This is gigantic.! (it is stewardship!)

Now before you get hysterical, there is a solution. It is not simple and easy but it is straightforward. Be a neighbor. You are in relationship. God merely asks that you attend to your relationships. Be in right relationship, let your community be balanced.

It is this awareness of neighbors which sends us out in mission, to meet our Lord in his need. Whether hungry or thirsty, or naked or sick. When we meet our neighbor, in their need, the care we show – is shown to none other than Christ our Lord!

Jesus says, "When you cared for these, the least, you cared for me!"

Pastor Dave