

Christ The King 2021  
November 21st  
CCM

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

A young couple had found a church where there was much shouting and clapping and jumping up and down during the course of the worship service. They were much moved by the enthusiasm they had witnessed there, and they were now trying to convince their grandmother that she should come and see for herself.

“You should have seen it!”, the young man said. “The power of the Holy Spirit was really rocking the place!”

Grandma kept rocking in her chair and didn’t say a word.

“And Grandma,” the young woman said, “You should have seen the preacher! He was shaking and thundering and the people were popping up like popcorn to praise the Lord! It was quite the show!”

Again, Grandma kept on rocking. Finally the young man said, “ Grandma, what’s wrong? Don’t you like the sound of our new church?”

Finally, Grandma stopped rocking and spoke. “Honey, let me put it to you this way. Honestly, I don’t care how loud they shout, and I don’t care how high they jump. It’s what they do when they come back down, well that’s what matters.”

As hard as it is to believe, another year has nearly come and gone. Thanksgiving is now only four days away. Next Sunday will mark the beginning of the Advent season and a new year in the calendar of the Church. And in only a month’s time, we will celebrate Christmas and usher in 2022. Just when I’m finally starting to write 2021 on my checks!

And so as we gather today for this final Sunday of the year, the Sunday we call “Christ the King”, it seems to me that this is the moment to revisit two of the great realities of life and faith that cannot be ignored or overlooked.

The first is this: Throughout our lives, there are beginnings and there are endings. Our journey through life is not unlike the unfolding of a good book. There is the title page, the introductory chapters, the development of a unique narrative, and, finally, the last word. And the wonder and the beauty of this is that each and every chapter carries the promise of new possibilities, that each page we turn, each day we awaken to, affords us new opportunities to live life, if we believe in God, as our God intends. The tragedy then in life is not death, but rather missing those opportunities to love and serve Christ, opportunities that pass us by unnoticed or ignored.

This leads to a second great reality this morning: No matter how much we value our individual rights and freedoms, we never live our lives in isolation. As the anglican priest and poet, John Donne, once wrote: “No man is an island...” The divine plan is always about community. God has ordained that our lives will always be intertwined with the lives of others. No matter what we

do, no matter where we go, we will always be sharing the chapters of our lives with others. Remember that the very first thing Jesus did when his public ministry began was to call together and form a community of disciples. Nor should it surprise us this morning that, of all of God's commandments, he taught us that the greatest were these: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind, AND (notice the conjunction) you shall do this best when you love your neighbor as yourself. In other words, we cannot experience the true fullness of life without community, community focused on active care and concern and genuine love for those with whom we share God's creation.

During the Adult Forum these past several weeks, we have been focusing on the meaning of the great parables that Jesus shared during his ministry. The last one we looked at was a parable that, thankfully, seems to be getting much attention in church circles these days. It is found in Matthew 25:31-46 and is often called "the parable of the sheep and the goats", although others refer to it as "The judgement of the nations." The story is about the return of the Son of Man, who is Christ the King, at the end of time in order to judge the communities of the world. Now, I know that judgment is not one of our favorite topics in the Episcopal Church. It certainly isn't one of mine! We prefer to focus on God's infinite love expressed in forgiveness and grace as revealed to the world in Jesus. Nonetheless, the teaching in this parable of the sheep and the goats cannot be dismissed because we are uncomfortable with judgment and "the last day" for to do so is close our minds to a part of God's truth that Christ came to reveal. Unlike Thomas Jefferson, I do not think we are free to take our scissors and cut out those parts of the Old and New Testaments that we don't like!

What essential lesson, then, is to be learned from this parable? I think that it is this: In the end, God judges us in accordance with our response to the needs of others found in our communities over the course of our earthly lives. God's judgment has little to do with the degrees we have obtained, nor the fame we have acquired, nor the fortunes we have amassed. Rather, this judgment will be entirely about the help that we have given to those who are suffering, or have refused to offer.

Furthermore, the parable speaks quite clearly about the help that we are to give. First, it must be help in the simple things. Jesus names several - providing food to those who are hungry, a cup of fresh water to those who are thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing those who are naked and cold, visiting the prisoner. These are efforts that all of us can make. No, we cannot individually save the world. But we can help those who are right around us. And it does not take an extraordinary amount of time, wealth, or energy to do so. It does require a heart, mind and faith that desires to simply give help to the people we meet every day.

Secondly, Jesus makes it clear that such help is to be uncalculating in nature. We offer simple assistance to others, not to gain brownie points with God, nor to put God in our debt for all the great things we are doing on God's behalf, but simply and faithfully to fulfill the second great commandment. If we give help in hopes of receiving some recognition or award, then we are pandering to our self-esteem. The parable makes it very clear that the help Jesus describes is help given for nothing but the sake of helping.

Finally, Jesus confronts us with this great truth: All such help we offer over the course of our our lifetimes is also help given to Christ himself. Conversely, and here is the judgment we prefer to avoid this Christ the King Sunday, is that all such help withheld from our neighbors in need is also help withheld from Christ as well. And if you take the time to read to the end of the parable, well, you will see that things don't go well for the "goats" in the parable!

Let me close with another story this morning, the story of St. Martin of Tours. Martin was a Roman soldier who lived in the fourth century. On a bitterly cold winter's day, as he was entering the city, a beggar stopped him and asked for alms. Martin had no money, but the man was obviously freezing to death, and so Martin shared what he had. He took off his soldier's coat, cut it in two, and gave half of it to the other man. That night, Martin had a dream. In the dream, he saw the kingdom of heaven and all the angels and Jesus standing in the midst of the heavenly community. One of the angels said to Jesus, Son of God, why are you wearing that cloak? Who gave it to you?

And Jesus replied, "My servant Martin gave it to me."

Amen.