

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole CA

Christ the King Sunday (*namesake*) November 22, 2020

“Christ the King”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning, and here we are back with Zoom. I was so excited about being back at church, and the thought of seeing you face-to-face in December. Well, enough said. The virus is at an all-time high, and we want to be safe; so we will Zoom away. Please remember I am here for you if you need a phone call, or a safe, masked, outside visit. I can even do FaceTime.

So here is a little bit of information you don't know about me. When I was asked to fill out my application for seminary, again for chaplaincy, and then for my parish profile, today's Matthew scripture appears. This is **my** stuff. And of course, this is **your** stuff too.

But I want to backup a moment. My parents were Baptists, and the worldview of most faith traditions back then was a little more “black and white” and I mean that in all respects. The faith of my childhood consisted of thinking a lot about “I don't know where I will be at the last judgment, but I know that I can control my actions.” There was also fear involved from that tradition. But I can attempt to feed the hungry, clothe those without clothes, and heal the sick; and if only through my prayers I could become righteous. This meant I signed up for youth programs, did food drives, built houses for the needy, etc. The time wasn't wasted, and who knew several decades later I would change careers and stand here before you as a priest. But most of all, I had to let go of the fears and let God lead me.

In my years of being a priest I have had so many moments when I have been able to do just what this scripture asks. But I haven't done it alone. Whatever I did was always with the support of some kind of community. A youth group, a parish, a non-profit. I am sorry to admit that there have also been times when I turned someone away without fully understanding or responding to their needs because I felt I was too busy or I just did not

understand their need. I am not talking about the people that I knew were trying to “play” me. But sometimes I judged too soon or just felt overwhelmed. Sometimes it took **others** to show me Christ in how **they** responded where I had failed. And then what does that say about my relationship with God, my righteousness? The childhood fears around my salvation?

That being said, that is **me** taking on way too much responsibility, and I remind **you** of the same. Today’s passage from Ezekiel says it is *God* who is gathering us: “Thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out (*Ezekiel 36:11*).” It is God who seeks us out. It is not through our actions that we are saved, but by God drawing close to us and gathering us in. Let go of the reins of your own salvation - God is in charge of that. I remind you because there are some traditions that claim they have control over salvation and God’s choices, which create a problem.

There are even clarifications of God being in charge presented in the Gospel that we may not like. Please notice that the righteous ask the King. ‘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?’ Do you know why this is important? Think about this. Evidenced clearly in the king’s response is that these, the righteous have done these things. But yet it seems, the righteous clearly don’t think they are righteous. These people had cared for their fellow human beings without thinking of repayment, not even realizing they had accomplished something so pleasing to the king.

And why are these humble works important? Because if we parallel God to being the King, each human being no matter what their circumstance, is a creation of His Own. They all have worth to God. Every human being has worth, and every human being can find themselves in a poor situation. We must act justly, and with mercy and I would also like to add humbly. That is clear. Even if it doesn’t gain us salvation. Do you know there are

atheists who do good in the world, just to do good, with no look for a heavenly gate entry? God maybe moving in their lives, despite what others may say.

In today's gospel passage from Matthew, Jesus says that the people who will be welcomed will be those who showed compassion and care for other beings, no matter their background. That includes no matter what their faith tradition, culture, race, gender, orientation and so forth. It is those with a hardened heart that are warned here.

But if you ponder further there is the possibility that Jesus wasn't only talking to individuals, but to groups. He said to one group: you saw me in the poor and the hopeless, and you responded. And to another group, you saw my suffering and you did not respond.

We cannot respond individually to every need that presents itself to us. But as a community we can and do see needs and try our best to respond, at least to many of them. Here at Christ the Lord, we are small, but mighty. We have a history of providing welcoming hospitality and serving to the best of our ability.

It is important that we remember we are not in charge of our own salvation, or anyone else's, as a matter of fact. We cannot earn our way into heaven or a peaceful afterlife, or whatever salvation means to you. We cannot emote ourselves into a feeling of bliss or peace without laying the groundwork for such an experience. But we are in charge of how we act and how we participate in the world; God's world.

That being said, the rest is up to God. Our personal relationship with God is an important one, and to have a relationship with God is to have a relationship with all he creates. We may want to judge some to be more important than others. Sorry to all the spiders I crushed trying to swoop them out the door, or mangled with a shoe in fear... but I do know even those spiders are part of the ecosystem beloved of God.

This country is in a very perilous time. We are actually becoming the animal that eats itself. Like a dog that chews off its leg to free itself from a trap. We are being asked to

come together; to work together. To realize we can not judge each other. We need to come together; we need to heal our families, our communities, and our country, even while trying to social distance. And I believe Christ the Lord Church is, and will continue to be, a work in progress to help this healing happen.

This holiday season, feed those who are hungry – whether it be for physical nourishment or a compassionate ear; clothe those who are naked, whether it is the donation of a coat or the warming of a heart. If you have opportunity to visit those in prison, whether a real prison or one of their own making; if you can free a friend or family member from guilt by giving or accepting forgiveness; do so. And if the only offer you have is prayer, know that that is one of highest offerings one can give because it allows God to intervene in the best way possible.

I love my job, as described on all my official paperwork. I love the work in the world this church has done in the past, is doing now, and will do in the future. Jesus is in each and everyone of us, as this scripture implies. And Jesus also shows up in the people we meet, and sometimes in unexpected ways. I do warn you however there may be some moments when Jesus was in our midst and we didn't see him in the neighbor. Sometimes Jesus is an unexpected and expensive date, with money we really had planned for something else. And sometimes Jesus is not on his or her best behavior! Sometimes, Jesus really needs a shower. But most of the time, most people are good to us when we are good to them. And if not, we are called to serve them anyway as best we can. Because they too (showered or not) are beloved of God, and also because that's what we at Christ the Lord do.

I want to thank everyone who continues to support Christ the Lord. I want to inspire you to keep doing the good work you are doing, even if it seems weird this year. This is also a time to remind you that you are not “less than” if you should find yourself to be the person in need. Christ is in you as well, let us help.

But more importantly, realize, you are not in charge of your own salvation, God's got that part, he always has, just ask Jesus. Isn't that why we call Christ the Lord. *Amen.*