

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Christ the King Sunday: November 26, 2023

The Least of These

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord church on the Sunday of our namesake, Christ the King. It is so appropriate that today's parable is about a King. Interestingly enough, this is the scripture that called me into my hospice work, and especially into chaplaincy. I am, at this time, preparing a pastoral ministry education class for new Episcopal deacons and our first reading is this reading from Matthew.

Our Gospel today starts with Jesus Christ as Lord and King coming in his glory. He is reviewing the lives of those who claim to love him referring to them as either sheep or goats. He then begins the separation between the two.

What is the basis of this separation? What are the criteria for this judgment? It's not about religious rituals. It's not about theological knowledge. It's not about spiritual experiences. It's about practical love. It's about compassionate action. It's about meeting the needs of the least of these.

What is interesting about today's Gospel is that Jesus seems to take favor with those who live by the Golden Rule. Remember that rule? The one that each religion has at its base even if the words are a bit different? We are being called by Jesus to not only do unto others as we would have them do unto us, but we

are asked to go a step farther and just do unto others with the understanding that each and every individual is precious to God.

We must take notice that Jesus is not calling us to do anything that he himself did not do while he walked the earth. His life shows us that living this life of serving God through serving others is not impossible. It can however occasionally get one in trouble.

Jesus himself fed the hungry, healed the sick, freed the chains of the lepers, and spiritually cleansed the desperate. Through understanding Jesus' life, and seeing his compassion and love, we too are called to transform our own way of being into a life of service.

Jesus identifies himself with the least of these saying, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." These are powerful statements. These statements challenge our priorities. They challenge our values. It can also challenge our lifestyle.

Interestingly enough the righteous are surprised at their recognition. They ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" They were not aware that their acts of kindness were acts of service to the Lord. They were simply responding to the needs around them. They were simply living out their faith in practical ways, through practical love.

Another side to this story is the warning for those who neglect the least of these. Jesus says, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." This is a sobering warning. It's a warning that calls us to self-examination. It's a warning that calls us to repentance. It makes clear the statements we pray each Sunday forgive me for what I have done, but also for what I have left undone.

Again, the people without compassion are surprised at their review. They ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?" They were not aware of their neglect. They were not aware of their indifference. They were not aware of their failure to love.

When Jesus replies, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." He is calling us to action, to practical love. This is a call to compassion. This is a call to live out our faith in practical ways.

That being said, I would like to share with you the other side of the coin, which is talked about so little. The other side being, what if you are the least of these? What if you are the one that needs some food, clothing or shelter? What if you are the one chronically struggling and need some help?

Asking and accepting help can be one of the hardest things to do in life. We all want to be independent, we all want to matter, we all want to serve God and each other, yet sometimes we can't. Well, let's just say, sometimes we think we can't. When all is said and done, if we are called to serve, who is it we are called to serve, if not each other?

There are always two sides to the story. If it is your turn to accept some help, you are allowing someone else to fulfill their desire to serve God. You are gracefully giving them the opportunity to do something for another brother or sister in Christ when they tend to you. We will all have periods of time in our lives when we give, and other times when it is appropriate, we receive.

With this in mind I want to applaud this congregation. I make several calls or receive calls throughout the week from many of our beloved community and I always smile when I hear the stories of food delivery, carpools, airport and doctor visit ride, and so much more that each of you here at Christ the Lord do for each other. It truly takes a village, and we are that village.

Hopefully you spent some time reviewing your thanksgivings this week. And our stewardship drive is now officially over as we enter the time of Advent. I promise, this is the last time you will hear this for a bit.

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters. Since we know that we will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.” It is the Lord Christ we are serving here at Christ the Lord. Amen.