

Christ the King A 17

November 26, 2017

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

Sometimes things come together between scripture, the accounts of the past and the present. This is Christ the King or the Reign of Christ Sunday lessons which lift up the abuse of the strong over the weak, the privileged against the poor, or the powerful over the powerless. I don't think it matters what side of the political divide you are on, the ethics of our political leaders and would be leaders, the actions of men in powerful positions over their assistants or of the celebrities over their fans is deplorable. When we as society give up authority or power to others we need to be aware they might abuse us with that same power. As well as remember that we as the people standing together against the abuses can retake or regain that authority at least over ourselves and who we are as God's people so we might live out the God's kingdom on earth.

This is the underlying motive in our reading from Ezekiel. God has had enough of the kings of the earth abusing and taking advantage his people. God has seen enough of the powerful exploiting the powerless for their own benefit. So the prophet comes to deliver a word of hope and promise to the people who were in exile who thought they had been forgotten. God declares 'I will be the shepherd of the sheep, I will seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured and strengthened the weak and I the Lord will be their God.'

Here God through the words of the prophet Ezekiel tells the people they have not been forgotten and their plight has been seen and God will act to restore justice for them. After all God is God and the kings, the political leaders, and the powerful are not. This is a powerful image for those suffering abuse at the hands of the powerful, for those who were in exile waiting for the coming

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of the Savior, waiting for the re-appearance of a new David to watch over them and to care for them as in the days of old.

The gospel lesson from Matthew runs along similar lines with a bit of a twist.

Here Jesus is nearing the end of his time on earth. After our reading for today Jesus' tells his followers what is about to take place, his betrayal which lead to his death on the cross. Here Matthew is tying up the loose ends in making his point about who Jesus is and the kingdom life we are called to live out in this world.

In the beginning of Matthew's gospel, we are told that Jesus is 'Immanuel' that is 'God with us'. Jesus is the embodiment of God on earth. Then as Jesus begins his ministry the first sermon he gives includes the beatitudes where Jesus turns the cultural understanding of who is blessed by God upside down. There Jesus proclaims, blessed are the poor, the hungry, the meek and the persecuted. So it should not be a surprise as we end this year in Matthew with a reminder of where and how Jesus is found in those who are poor or hungry or in the stranger or the sick.

Here Jesus offers the last of his three apocalyptic teachings offering a little more direct teaching of the ethics of the new kingdom, that with words also come actions. Because life in the kingdom is living as Christ would have us live which includes from Matthew's view, to love everyone including the least among us as well as those we deem unworthy of our love.

Each time I study a text I learn something new and the new thing in this text was when Jesus said 'all nations will be gathered before him' he was referring to the other nations of the world, specifically the non-Jewish peoples. For us we might say Jesus is gathering all the non-Christians to pronounce judgment upon their actions in how well did they act according to Jesus' standards.

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That is did they welcome the stranger, did they feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or visit the sick? It will not matter if they did or did not do these things, for both groups will ask when was it that they accomplished or failed to accomplish those things. The nations, the sheep and the goats alike will both be perplexed by Jesus' observation of their actions asking when did we do or not do that which you have told us about.

This new way of seeing this story can be refreshing especially if we see ourselves as the least or the forgotten ones because those others, the non-believers, those who believe wrongly will get what is coming to them for abusing or mistreating us. Yet I think this word of warning is just as strong or stronger for us who believe, because we know who Jesus is and in many ways we have become the embodiment of Jesus in the world. So I believe this does not automatically make us to be sheep, because who would be better equipped to be able to see the face of Jesus in the other and we are?

Yet we are also people of the world, who often live according to the rules and the expectation of the culture around us. Here we are told to hate our enemy and not care about those less fortunate and ourselves. After all they made their choices, they had the same chances we were offered and look how well we turned out. We do our best and many times do offer a hand out or a hand up, but we often put limits on our generosity. I am no different as I work with people who come in looking for help or support week after week. As the same person comes time after time it is harder and harder to see in their face the face of Jesus. But I know Jesus is there, because Jesus is here among us. After all I believe we are all children of God part of the family with Jesus our brother.

But because we are family, brothers and sisters with Jesus we are reminded of who we are and whose we are in our calling to love others as we live out the

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kingdom in this life. Like many of you Debbie and I spent time with family over the Thanksgiving holiday. As we are getting older and our family has had to deal with injury or illness we gave thanks for the love and support given and received in the last few years. Not only issues Debbie and I went through a few years ago with her broken hip and a heart attack or my broken foot. There were also other family members who had surgery or dealt with cancer and a cousin who died after a long illness. There we came together as family to love and support each other without asking or expecting anything in return. That is what we do for family.

Then with this text in my mind, as we drove to Debbie's brother's house, I was reminded of a older couple from my internship congregation who lived in the next town over from where we were headed. They were a couple who truly lived out of the joy of the kingdom every day. During my time on internship there was not a month that went by that Marty did not tell me about how she picked up a hitchhiker and fed them or put them up for the night or contacted a trucker friend to help them get on toward their destination. She and her husband truly saw Jesus in everyone they met.

You see as a brother or sister of Jesus, we are family to more than just those we are related to. In the kingdom we are all members of the household of God, called to care and love everyone. That is why for me this story of the sheep and the goats is one of warning but also one of hope and promise. For in the death and resurrection of Jesus our bondage to the sins and the hatred of this world has been broken, thus freeing us to live a kingdom live of love and mercy. This is the new ethic we have been called to live, to seek justice for the powerless, to offer mercy to the persecuted, to give hope to the hopeless and to love all.

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This is the prayer Paul is lifting up for us and for the people of Ephesus when he wrote; *'I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him. So that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.'*

And this is the hope. That you might live out the kingdom of God on earth, extending the love and mercy, the kindness and generosity to other just as you have received it from God , so that you might become the embodiment of Jesus to others, allowing others to see that Christ is King and Lord in your life, offering the love of God to a world in need of Christ's mercy and love.

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael