

Christ the King Sunday
Matthew 25:31-46
November 26, 2017

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Today is Christ the King Sunday - the final Sunday of the church year; when we begin preparing for Advent and the birth of our savior, Jesus Christ. On this Sunday, which the church has set aside in its calendar year, we are reminded of Jesus' role as King. In our appointed gospel text from Matthew Jesus paints a portrait, yet again, of one aspect of his kingship. Within this image we hear echoes of the words we confess nearly every Sunday as found in the Apostles' Creed, "He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead." Here within this story we find the Son of Man returning in his glory where he will reside on his throne as all the nations are gathered before him and he separates the good from the bad as Jesus uses the metaphor of a shepherd separating sheep from goats.

Then, the king (aka the Son of Man) relates to both groups, those at his right hand who have been blessed by his Father in heaven and will inherit the kingdom of God and those on his left hand who are accursed and doomed to a rather horrific eternal resting spot. It all seems to boil down to how they have served the King.

Or, rather, how they have responded to the calling to “love their neighbor” or serve those Jesus lifted up in the Beatitudes. For in doing so Jesus lifts up the fact they have subsequently served Him. As revealed in this story, they who were the hungry and thirsty, the stranger in need of hospitality, those naked needing to be clothed, those whom are sick and imprisoned alone in their suffering and solitude. These are those whom sit at Jesus’ right hand and are declared righteous. They are blessed and He tells them they will inherit the kingdom prepared by His Father. However, they don’t understand. “How can this be?” “Jesus, when have we seen you hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or imprisoned?” “When did we take care of you?” Jesus gives them and us the answer. It is in the suffering of the world where we find this King. It is in the outcast, the lost, the helpless, and the oppressed that we find Jesus Christ. While He is certainly present here this morning and resides in each of us, today he reminds us that He is also in those places and in those people we least expect to find Him. The righteous did not realize that in caring for those less fortunate they were also caring for Jesus. As for those on Jesus’ left, they are sentenced into eternal punishment for they failed to serve those groups of people Jesus lifted up and in so doing rejected Him as well.

Who is in? Who is out? This text, just a so many we have encountered over the last several weeks, tend to lend itself to that question. Or even, did we do enough to be the ones sitting at the right hand of the king? This is not for us to

know. It's not for us to decide. All we do know is that we live by grace. God's grace revealed in our king who gave of himself so that we might live. We might be free. To paraphrase Luther, Christ has freed us from the power of sin, death and the devil and in return, He has freed us to serve. Through this most gracious gift of grace in Christ we are moved to respond to our neighbor in love.ⁱ Grace that enables us to see the king who Christ truly is for the world. A king that lived a different lifestyle than kings of yesterday, today and tomorrow. A king that truly walked with those who hungered, those who were poor, those who were alone, those who were ill, and those who were imprisoned by a host of things that had bound them.

We live by grace. Grace embedded and entrusted to us by the Holy Spirit that sustains us confidently with the faith we don't have to worry about whether or not we will reside in the everlasting arms of the God of grace we worship. It is this grace that frames our reading of this passage. It is this grace that drives us forward with eyes that do see Jesus dwelling in us but also see Jesus dwelling with and in those whom so often seem to be on the outside looking in. Grace that picks up again and again when we do fail to act, see, or hear the cries, pleas, and plights of 600,000 plus homeless people in the United States.ⁱⁱ Or the 805 million people in the world who go hungry each day.ⁱⁱⁱ Or the 1 million plus adults and children in Africa die from HIV/Aids annually.^{iv} Or, the child in Africa dies from Malaria

every 30 seconds^v Or 1 in 6 women in this country will be sexually assaulted during their life.^{vi} Or those who continue to stand outside the lines of some circles, privileges, and equalities afforded to all people because they are female. Because they are black. Because they are gay. Because they are Hispanic. Because they are poor. Because they are old or young. Because they are unemployed. Because they are Muslim. Yes, it is grace that forgives when we fail to see Christ in our neighbor and fail to stand with our neighbor and welcome our neighbor as He does. As he has welcomed them. This is the beautiful, awesome, and joyful gift of grace that we have in Christ. However, grace cannot end there. Grace picks us back up and grace nudges us forward. It pulls us on us a like a child pulls on us to be led to the toy section of the department store before Christmas. It pulls on us like a puppy dog wanting to be walked. Grace continues to call. Grace continues to be active. Grace continues to nudge us from the safety and security of our lives and into the very places and to the very people Christ goes to. We can't escape this grace no matter how hard we try. It is part of our DNA as Christians. Grace drives us forward rejoicing. Giving thanks in all circumstances. Praying unceasingly.

Grace is the breeze that gently blows against our sails and sends us forth to be the people God which respond out of that grace. Grace is the running water and gentle waves that move our boats forward to bear the fruits of grace. Fruits of love. Compassion. Gentleness. Joy. Thanksgiving. Generosity. Justice.

Kindness. Forgiveness. Encouragement. Hospitality. Hope. Patience.

Endurance. Grace that is alive just as we remember on this Christ the King Sunday and every Sunday that we gather for worship that our King is alive. Our King has died. Our King has risen. Our King will come again. Amen.

ⁱ Martin Luther, *The Augsburg Confession*, Article XX.

ⁱⁱ “The 2013 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress;
www.hudexchange.info

ⁱⁱⁱ www.bread.org

^{iv} <https://beta.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-hiv-africa>

^v www.elca.org/malaria

^{vi} www.rainn.org