

Christ the King Sunday  
Sermon Text: Matthew 25:31-46  
Related Text: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24  
Date Preached: November 23, 2008

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Images can be both a tremendous help and at the same time, a roadblock. Today is one of those Sundays. Today is Christ the King.

The image of a King is one of authority. A King rules over his territory and people. A King legislates, dictates, mandates while his subordinates carry forth his will.

Yet, Jesus is no ordinary King. This King of Kings and Lord of Lords does not rule from a high throne with a scepter in one hand wearing long royal garments. Jesus is out among his people and not always with people in the obvious places, but among people in the humblest of circumstances.

Exchanging royal robes for ordinary street garments, Jesus takes towel in hand and models loving service. Yes, this King issues commands—Love God. Love your neighbor. In issuing these commands, Jesus doesn't sit by and wait for his mandates to be carried out. He gets his hands dirty. He associates with

prisoners, he spends time among the sick, he dines with outcasts; he chooses to be in the last places you would expect to see a king.

As much as Jesus models for us what we are to do, such modeling goes beyond simple actions. You see it is not enough for us to look at texts like Matthew 25 and say, Ah ha. This must be what we have to do. We have to be like the sheep. If we are, then we will get into heaven. If we are the goats, weelll let's just say that eternal punishment doesn't sound all that appealing. This is not what the text is saying.

Behind the actions are the reasons for which we act. It goes to attitude. It goes to Love.

We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart mind and soul. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. These are the two greatest commandments. On the surface this is a second commandment text. So the question is asked, "Who is my neighbor?"

In the Gospel of Luke this very question was asked. Jesus answered it by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. For those who don't know, the parable focuses on a man who was beaten by robbers and left for dead. The honorable people one would expect to

help this person pass him by pretending not to notice. It is a Jewish outside, a Samaritan who stops, helps the man, takes him to an inn and pays the inn keeper what is needed. The neighbor in the story is the one that you'd least likely acknowledge. The neighbor is the one who shows mercy.

Our neighbors are not simply the people we know, whose life hardships we have some idea qualify for our assistance. In fact, our neighbors live both near and far. Our neighbors are known by name and face. Our neighbors are strangers we have never had the pleasure of meeting.

Our neighbors are American. Our neighbors are also people of every nationality, every level of the economic scale from the executives asking for government bailouts to the millions who will die today because they have no food.

It is among God's people, among our neighbors where Christ is present. We could at times point to people and say that we see Christ among them. We might even expect to see Christ among some people.

There is however, a shocking surprise for us. We may not expect to see Christ in the face of the abuser, the illegal alien, the beggar on the street, the AIDS

patient, Yet There He Is! Jesus shows himself in the places and among the people where we don't expect him.

This is the calling of the church. We are the body of Christ walking with and among the poor, serving as the voice for those who are fearful of speaking out against injustice, and being a forgiving presence among those in prison because of their crimes or those in the prisons of their life circumstances.

This text does speak to a judgment. However, it is not we who serve as the judges of mercy. The people we may be thinking of are not deserving of this mercy, but if they were then this would not be mercy.

The judgment is God's to execute. Yet, God also is a God of mercy. God's mercy extends to those who are undeserving; God's mercy is for you and for me.

As recipients of God's mercy we are the ones who give of ourselves. We become the giving tree. We give our time. We gift our physical and emotional energy. We give our money. To do so is to love neighbor. To do so is to love God. To do so reflects the truth that we ourselves have been the recipients of God's grace made real in the person of Jesus Christ.

This is what we as the church are about. This is our purpose. As the body of Christ we are sent out from the surprising encounter of Christ in bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, only to discover that Christ is already waiting for this community of faith in those suffering in the world.

These are the people suffering in Haiti, Darfur, Iraq, Greensburg, Mt. Pleasant, Latrobe, and all the other little towns on and off the map. Christ is there. Christ is waiting for us to join him.