

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Christ the King Sunday - Year A
36th Sunday of Quarantine (38th Overall)
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Psalm 95:1-7a
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.’ ⁴¹Then he will say to those at his

left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ 45Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Christ as Other

Good morning! During the summer after the first year at seminary, one usually does what is called Clinical Pastoral Education, or CPE for short. It’s a six week long stint as a chaplain at high level trauma center hospitals across the country, or if you were like me, you serve at the Lowman Home in Chapin, SC. It was a 30 minute ride from the seminary, and every morning four of us would pile into a car and drive to the retirement home. Lowman Home, which I think is technically called The Heritage at Lowman, was a Lutheran retirement center that specializes in offering graduated care. They had independent living single story homes on the property, small apartments that offered more care, and a memory care building. They also had one entire building dedicated to long term

assistance and rehabilitation. It was in this rehab building that I learned one of the most important lessons that a Christian can learn: it's one thing to talk about caring for the sick and suffering, but it's a very different thing in practice.

The people were fantastic, but the job wasn't always easy, and it was here that I discovered that nurses, especially those that work at retirement homes, are probably first in line for heaven. They're saints, the whole lot of them. It was in the rehab center that the bulk of our visits would take place. And it was here where we tried to care for patients, some of whom were unable to leave their bed. Others were nearing death, unable to speak or often completely unaware of their surroundings. It was easy to love these people, but as anyone in the medical field could tell you, it wasn't easy to love the smell.

Confined to beds, at differing stages of life, while I was walking down the hallways I would often encounter a few lingering odors. And in the midst of this, I learned the reality of our passage today, of the importance of caring for the stranger. Because it's easy to want to run away from a situation where an elderly individual has soiled themselves and is completely unaware, or is at a point where it no longer matters to them. Sometimes, they WERE aware, and just as embarrassed as any of us would be, and so every CPE chaplain learns the importance of human dignity.

In the midst of that lesson was a deeper truth. As Dianne Marshall said this past Monday at Bible study, it's easy to be nice and caring for the people that we love. It's a very different thing when it comes to strangers, or those we don't like or enjoy. Think about that for a second. It doesn't really say anything about us if we're able to be loving to our friends and family. As

I have said before, even Hitler was nice to his dog. What truly sets us apart is how we act the rest of the time.

The reality of this truth is beautifully illustrated in today's Gospel text. Today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. It's basically New Year's Eve for the church. We follow a three year cycle, called the lectionary. And Christ the King Sunday signals the end of one year, and Advent signals the beginning of the next. They have given each of the three years stunningly original names; year A, year B, and Year C. And for the past year, year A, we have been focusing primarily on the Gospel of Matthew. But today we come to the end. As we celebrate the ultimate rule of Jesus Christ and the very best of what the Gospel of Matthew has to offer, it all boils down into this one lesson.

It can be easy to become distracted by the language of sheep and goats, but at its heart is a message regarding how we see others, most importantly, our ability to see Christ within them. If you're a good Lutheran, when you read this text you probably get a little anxious. It sure sounds like we can earn our way into heaven, and that sounds a whole lot like works righteousness! We can't have that! Fortunately, it's not. In the story today those that inherit the kingdom discover that it isn't just their actions that have justified this gift, but that they have done it without expecting anything in return. It's the stranger returning the wallet, not realizing they're being filmed. It's the good Samaritan helping feed the hungry, all without sharing it on social media. One inherits heaven when one treats others as a human being.

I know, I know. It's easier said than done. But when we look into the stranger's eyes and see Jesus Christ, when we confront our enemy and instead of violence we embrace in forgiveness, we get to see something

special: the same truth that God has always known: we are all loved. Each and every one of us.

“34Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Amen.