

King of Glory Lutheran Church
November 21/22, 2020
Year A: Christ the King: Matthew 25:31-46
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Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵ *I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason* ¹⁶ *I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.* ¹⁷ *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,* ¹⁸ *so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,* ¹⁹ *and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.* ²⁰ *God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,* ²¹ *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.* ²² *And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church,* ²³ *which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

Matthew 25:31-46

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.* ³² *All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,* ³³ *and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.* ³⁴ *Then 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;* ³⁵ *for 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,* ³⁶ *I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’* ³⁷ *Then 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?’* ³⁸ *And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?’* ³⁹ *And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’* ⁴⁰ *And 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.’*

⁴¹ *Then 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;* ⁴² *for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,* ⁴³ *I 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.’* ⁴⁴ *Then 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?’* ⁴⁵ *Then 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.’* ⁴⁶ *And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

Have you ever wondered what Jesus looked like when you hear the stories of Jesus in the gospels? When I was child I remember having a great big fight with a close friend. It was a fight about what Jesus looked like. What color eyes did Jesus have? What color was his skin? What color was his hair? What did his voice sound like? We had very different ideas to the point where my friend and I argued over whose picture of Jesus was correct.

Close your eyes for a moment. Imagine Jesus standing right in front of you. What does he look like? Is the picture clear or is it kind of fuzzy? Maybe you have a very detailed image of Jesus or maybe it is a feeling more than a clear picture in color.

This weekend we celebrate Christ the King. This weekend marks the last day of the church year. Next week we will begin a new year in the church with the Advent season where we wait and prepare for Jesus to come.

But for today we celebrate Christ our King. And because it's the end of the year we are invited to reflect as we do when a season of time comes to a close.

Every church year our readings focus on a different gospel. This past year we have spent a lot of time in the gospel of Matthew. Next year we will be focused on the gospel of Mark.

Now Matthew's gospel is known for its themes of righteousness and discipleship, judgment and mercy. And now our time with Matthew is coming to a close. Do you remember how Matthew's gospel begins?

Chapter one recites a list of Jesus' ancestors. His family line beginning with Abraham through David all the way to Joseph. And the interesting thing about Jesus' family tree is that there are all kinds of people in it. Women who were foreigners like Tamar and Ruth. People who made mistakes and were known for some scandals like David. People who faced exile and oppression. Jesus' family history is full of people who are both insiders and outsiders, righteous and unrighteous, greedy and generous.

And then of course there is the story of Jesus' birth. Unusual to say the least and certainly unexpected for the Son of God and Christ our King.

From the very beginning of this gospel, Matthew shows us that Jesus is going to be very different from who we expect a king to be. And the first chapter of Matthew is a sign for us of Jesus' ministry to come.

As the gospel continues, Matthew records Jesus' teachings and his Sermon on the Mount which includes the Beatitudes. These are words that define those who are blessed by God with God's presence, comfort, authority, righteousness and mercy.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”

These don't sound like people who have been blessed by our standards. Jesus shows us what blessing means for God. Jesus blesses those who have been forgotten, those who suffer, those who have lost hope. Because in Jesus' kingdom there is room for everyone, especially those people that we do not consider blessed, that we do not see or do not want to see.

And today we hear Jesus' last teaching in Matthew's gospel before he goes to the cross. And again he speaks of those who are blessed by telling a story about a king and his people.

“Then 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; for 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, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

Then 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? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And 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.’”

And we thought we knew what a king looked like. We might have even thought we knew what Jesus looked like. But it turns out that Christ our King looks like many, many different people. He has eyes that are green and blue and brown and grey. Skin and hair of every color. He speaks every language. He is a she. And a child, a teenager, a young adult, an adult, a senior. He looks like those who are suffering and hungry, alone and afraid, unloved, unwanted, unknown.

In this story Jesus tells us today he asks us to take a long look at the picture we hold of him. A picture we hold that might be of a king who is handsome, strong, rich, clean and familiar.

Jesus says, look again. Look for me with new eyes. Because you will find me in people who don't look anything like an earthly king or a queen. To find Christ our King, you have to look with the eyes of your heart.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians a beautiful prayer that we heard read today. A prayer that they and we might have the eyes of our heart enlightened that we might see God and know God.

Paul writes, “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, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been given new eyes today. And we need them. For who among us has not missed Christ sitting next to us, living next door, or in our community. Who among us has not failed to help those in need of a warm coat, in need of a friend, in need of a word of hope or kindness? We do not always see people with the eyes of our hearts as God does.

But we are not a lost cause. Our story is not finished. That is why God gave us Jesus and continues to forgive us and love us and teach us. For even as we are convicted of our own blindness we are set free by God's extravagant love and mercy to live a new life following Jesus' example.

It is tempting to follow a king who looks great, is wealthy, powerful, well connected, and tells us what we want to hear. But on this day we are called to follow a different kind of king. One who calls us to see God in people and compassion and love... not in physical attributes, wealth or power.

Christ our King says that we will find him when we truly look for him in the faces all around us. When we serve him by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, praying for our enemies, forgiving one another, showing kindness to a stranger.

So today and in this new church year let us follow the true king of love wherever he leads us. May we come to know and see him by serving one another.

Amen.