



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“HOW DO WE SERVE CHRIST THE KING?”

Scripture Lessons: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Matthew 25:31-46

*This sermon was preached by Rev. Tracey W. Daniel. on Sunday, November 22, 2020
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Matthew 25:31-46

‘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. 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, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 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.” 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; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 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.” 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?” 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.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

The word of God, for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Our New Testament lesson today was from the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew was written to a primarily Jewish community and they knew the teachings of the Old Testament very well. Much of the writing in Matthew helps us make a transition from the Old Testament prophecies to the New Testament fulfillment through the life of Jesus Christ.

In today's lesson, we hear the story that Jesus is telling his disciples towards the end of his earthly ministry. Jesus tells his followers a story about a king. Suzie has already told us a little bit about what we might imagine as a king, but if you will for just a minute, think about what you think of when you hear the word king. The first thing that comes to my mind is someone with a royal purple robe on, a crown with lots of jewels. And recently I've been watching the *Crown*, so I've gotten some ideas from the Netflix series about what being a king was really like. It required a lot of responsibility, as well as it also gives a lot of privilege. But in the story today, Jesus compares the king to a shepherd. He says in the story that his king that he's talking about, the

image that should come to mind, is the Shepherd King, powerful like the King and caring like the Good Shepherd.

Jesus' story begins with the king separating his people like a shepherd separates the goats from the sheep. Now that reference may be lost on some of us today, but in biblical times, the goats and the sheep, particularly in Syria, were easy to tell apart. The sheep generally were white and the goats were black; and even as the day became a little darker and dusk came, it was very easy for the shepherd to decide which side were the sheep and which were the goats. In the story, the sheep are placed on the right-hand side of the shepherd and the goats on the left. The sheep represented the subjects who did exactly what the King wanted them to do even though they were unaware that they have been doing it, and the goats on the left hand side thought they were doing what they were supposed to but it turns out they weren't.

So, what does all this mean for us today? Well, the first thing is I think we all know that we would prefer to be sheep rather than goats. Second, we want to think about how we might be Christ's sheep. What is it we need to do and how do we need to live to please Christ our King? The second message is about Jesus being a Shepherd King, having expectations of us, namely that we are to live like the Shepherd King did, we're to use our power and care for others. We're not called to live lives self-absorbed; it's not God's desire that we think only of ourselves but that we love God and love our neighbors.

Contrary to what advertisements might tell us or our social media might expect of us, our life is not supposed to be about a Pinterest worthy post or look like a page out of a magazine or show that we have the happiest Facebook online. Instead, we are called to action. Christ disciples are called to see, provide, give, shelter, visit and care, feed the hungry, provide water to the thirsty, give warmth, give clothes to those who don't have enough, shelter the homeless, visit the prisoners, care for the sick, and all this is done with love and not counting the cost or keeping a tally of what we've done.

In the year 1925 when Christ the King Sunday first began being celebrated in our churches, the reason for this was that there was such a rise and resurgence in nationalism, that the church officials thought, "You know, we really need to remind everybody that Christ is the King. " Christ is the King of Christians and so that's how this Sunday celebration got started. That was over 95 years ago, and we are still struggling to remember who it is we serve. We serve Christ the King, the Shepherd King who makes taking care of the sheep his main occupation.

Dolores Dufner, a contemporary hymn writer, wrote these words in a hymn titled "O Christ, What Can it Mean for Us." Listen to these words that Dufner uses to describe Christ the King

*O Christ, what can it mean for us to claim you as our King?
What royal face have you revealed whose praise the church would sing?
Aspiring not to glory's height, to power, wealth, and fame,
You walked a diff'rent, lowly path, another's will your aim.*

*You came, the image, the image of our God, to heal and to forgive,
To shed your blood for sinners' sake that we might rise and live.
To break the law of death you came, the law of love to bring:*

A diff'rent rule of righteousness, a diff'rent kind of king.

*Though some would make their greatness felt and lord it over all,
You said the first must be the last and service be our call.
O Christ, in workplace, church, and home, let none to power cling;
For still, through us, you come to serve, a diff'rent kind of king.*

*You chose a humble human form and shunned the world's renown;
You died for us upon a cross with thorns your only crown.
But still, beyond the span of years, our glad hosannas ring,
For now at God's right hand you reign, a diff'rent kind of king!*

Christ the King Sunday, it marks the last Sunday in the churches calendar. Next week we begin the liturgical calendar all over again as we begin with Advent. Advent prepares us to welcome the Christ child and we go through the story of Christ's life and death and resurrection, and we'll come back to this place again next year about this time.

Jesus calls us to help bring in that Kingdom that Jesus lived, to teach us about. We're called to do, this by helping the least of these. Who are the least of these? We can look to Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus said that he himself identifies with these least of these; think of the blind beggars, the lepers, the sick, the tired and lonely, the little children, the woman at the well, the tax collector...anyone who can use our help, anyone who might be considered the least of these. Jesus tells us when we do this for these, we do it unto him.

There's a story that many of you may know that Leo Tolstoy wrote. The title of the story is "Where Love is, God is." The story was retold in a claymation film; you can watch it on YouTube. The producer is Will Velton and the title of it is "Martin the Cobbler," and it's actually narrated by Tolstoy's daughter. You may know the story but in case you don't, I'm going to tell you a little bit about it.

There once was a cobbler named Martin, and he lived in a Russian village. He was lonely and angry. He was mad at God; his wife had died the very first year they were married, and his young son had only lived to be a young boy and he died. Martin had pretty much given up on living and he pretty much had given up on God.

One day a friend comes by and says, "Martin, we've got this community service project and I want you to come help me. It'll be great and you can be of help. And Martin says, "No, I'm too old. I'm not going to do that; I'm tired. I'm not interested in helping." Then the friend looks at Martin, and he says, "You know, perhaps you are in despair because you live only for yourself. Perhaps you are in despair because you live only for yourself."

Well the very next day, a holy man came by and he brought this big Bible, it looked sort of like this Bible. The back of it needed to be rebound and he said, "Hey, I've heard you're a good cobbler, can you fix this Bible?" And Martin said, "Well, you don't want to give it to me. God and I, we're not on speaking terms." And the holy man said, "Well, maybe you should read the Bible while I leave it here with you, and I'd love for you to fix it." So that night, Martin sits down, and

he reads a little bit of the Bible and falls asleep, and he wakes up remembering a dream. He dreamed that the Lord said, "I'm going to come by tomorrow and visit you in your shop. So all day long you can imagine Martin as he's working away on those shoes looking out the window. "Well, maybe is the Lord going to come by?" Sure enough, he saw somebody out the window, so he rushes up there. Who is it, but the guy who's cleaning off the sidewalk. "Oh, it's just the sidewalk cleaner." Well, he stepped out to speak to him and realized he was really cold. There was actually snow all over the ground, and he invited the guy in for some tea, and he actually even told him the story. He said, "I thought my dream might have come true," and they had a kind of a good laugh about that. He said, "Well, thank you for the tea," and he went on about his way.

Later on in the day, a woman, a young woman with a baby, and it is windy and cold and the baby's crying, and so once again Martin goes up to the door and invites the woman in. "Why don't you come in and warm up a little bit, and I see your baby looks cold, too." And he noticed the woman was not dressed very warmly, and he just happened to have an old coat that his wife once wore just hanging right there on a hook in the shop. He said, "Here, take this," and the woman said, "Oh, thanks be to God, you have really saved me today," and she leaves and says thank you.

And then later in the day, somebody else had made this noise outside. He goes to see what it is, and it's a teenager and older woman, and they're sort of scrambling between each other having some conflict. And Martin goes out and he settles that, and of course in the end, everything works out really well for them. Martin goes on to bed disappointed, and he thinks, "Well, either I'm a foolish old man and that story that I was thinking was true in my dream was all just nonsense or God just doesn't keep his promises." And so he went on to sleep.

And for those of you who know the story, he woke up and he actually was in the middle of a dream, and in the dream he saw God, and God said, "Hey, I came to see you today." And Martin said, "You didn't come see me. I looked for you all day." "And he said, "Yes. I did; I came to you as the street sweeper, and I came to you as a young mother and the baby, and as a teenage boy and the older woman. Whenever you do something for other people look for my face." That experience changed Martin's outlook on life. The next day when his friend came by to do this community service event, he said, "Hey, let me go with you, and he was renewed."

And I think the lesson for us today is that when we take our time and our power and our resources and serve the least of these, whoever that might be, whoever might be overlooked or ignored or worse yet, disrespected, when we help the least of these, then we're following in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior Christ our King, and we're doing the work that we're called to do.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.