

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Lindale, Texas
November 26, 2017
Last Sunday After Pentecost
Christ the King Sunday
Proper 29
Matthew 25:31-46
The Rev. John P. Carr

Christ is the King

On my recent trip to the Holy Land I wanted to walk where Jesus walked, see the land and the water that Jesus saw, meet the descendants of the people of the land on this journey.

I did see the Old City, the Wailing Wall that was the foundation of the Temple mount, the land of the Sea of Galilee and the places along the shore of that body of water where Jesus walked. We saw Bethlehem and Nazareth and points in between but that was not where I saw Jesus.

- I saw Jesus on the sidewalk as we entered a restaurant our first night there.
- I experienced Jesus in the outstretched hand of an old woman who sat on the sidewalk unnoticed by the passersby and those entering the café.
- I saw Jesus in her eyes when I put a few coins into her outstretched hand and she said in her language, *"thank you, God bless you."*
- I thought of today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew and the reading came alive for me.

In the following days the land of Jesus came alive too. Everything was close. Everything was walking distance. It was easy to experience the land by walking and imagine where Jesus walked because the land has changed little in the last 2,000 years. The buildings have changed but the land is the same.

It became apparent that Jesus had spent his time in ministry about seventy miles north of Jerusalem for the same reason that his family had settled in Nazareth. That was to be far away from Jerusalem.

From the moment that Jesus read the Isaiah scroll in Nazareth forward, he was a marked man. He was claiming to be the Messiah and the Pharisees would not tolerate such a claim. It would mess up their world for the promised Messiah to arrive on their watch!

But following his ministry in Galilee, he did set his face to Jerusalem for his final journey there. As he has entered Jerusalem to the hosannas of the crowd on Palm Sunday, Jesus was beginning his triumphal entry while the forces who oppose him are assembling a plot to arrest and kill him.

The powers of the Temple have not served the people well and they are the target of Jesus as he approaches the Temple on Monday. The scribes, Sadducees and Pharisees have all failed their people because they are more interested in keeping their positions than serving their God.

He boldly enters the temple courts and begins flipping over the tables of the money changes and those selling doves for sacrifice. He has upset their business in a big way. But worse, he continues into the Temple to do amazing things that Monday afternoon as he heals the blind and the lame who come to him. He made a most unusual entry for a King but an entry that announced that he is the Chosen One who is fulfilling the scriptures.

He left the Temple grounds and crossed the Kidron Valley to the east going up the road across the Mount of Olives to Bethany to spend the night with his friends and followers. He had made himself known in Jerusalem but tomorrow would be even more dramatic.

The next day he left Bethany early to get a good start on the day and walked the two miles back to the Temple where he began teaching in parables particularly addressing the scribes and the Pharisees. His parables were about doing the will of God using the example of the Parable of the Two Sons. Then he openly criticized the Pharisees with the Parable of the Tenants and it hurt. The Pharisees started to put their plan into place to arrest him.

Christ the King continued with Parables that were pointedly criticizing the elites of the Temple calling them out as hypocrites. This was a very strong and uncommon word to use. A hypo-crite in those days was an actor who wore a mask. He was comparing them to actors on the stage who wore masks of piety and righteousness but were behind the masks the worst kind of leaders of his people. They were whitewashed tombs

that were white on the outside and rotten within. Jesus again left the Pharisees in a rage.

He went back across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives to rest and teach his disciples. They asked him about the end of the age that he had talked about. He taught them in stories and parables to be ready, to be prepared for judgement but that no one, not even Christ knew when this would be.

Christ did know that he would be at the center of this end of the age as he would return in glory as a King. All nations would gather before him and be judged. He would separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

But what will be the determining thing in this judgement?

It will be the fulfillment of the greatest commandments.

The difference between the sheep and the goats will be how they were faithful to God by following his commandments to love God and to love their neighbor. This love of their neighbor is shown in how they treated their neighbor.

Did they respond to the needs of the hungry, the cold, the naked, the thirsty, the sick, those in prison and the homeless?

If they did address the needs of these people, then they may enter the Kingdom of the King and take their inheritance.

Christ the King is speaking to us today across the ages as clearly as if we were there with the disciples.

- Have we followed the commandments of God?
- Have we loved God and loved our neighbor?
- Have we been responsive to the needs of others or been hypocrites showing the image of charity but inside we are selfish?
- Have we shown forgiveness?
- Have we followed Jesus because we believe in Him?
- Have we put our faith into action for the good of others?
- Have we been holy as God is holy?

The wonderful news is that *the life of Jesus*, Christ the King, was recorded for us to read, mark and inwardly digest so that his life can live through our lives.

- We have been given a take home test with the answer sheet on the back.
- Christ the King has shown us by his life, death and resurrection the Way of Christ, the Way of sacrificial love.
- We have only to return the love of the King that was first given to us.
- He leaves us with this direction to guide our actions,
“even as you have done it unto the least of these you have done it unto me.”

Amen

