

Sunday, November 26, 2023 ***“Christ the King”***

Ephesians 1:15-23 Matthew 25:31-46

So how is your ‘spirit of wisdom’ and knowledge of Jesus today? This is the last Sunday of this church year but for many people thoughts and ideas are not on Jesus who reigns but on the celebration 4 weeks away where we will eat, spend money and gather around a tree to share gifts. And for many people, the story of Jesus’ birth will not be shared but stories of Christmases past and favourite Christmas themed movies will be seen.

Christ’s reign is a feast in the liturgical year which emphasises the true kingship of Christ. This means that Jesus Christ has dominion over all creatures, a dominion not seized by violence nor usurped, but his by essence and by nature. His kingship is founded upon the understanding that Jesus is both human and divine. Not only is Christ is to be adored by angels and people, but that to him as human, angels and people are subject, and must recognize Jesus’ kingdom that is, Christ has power over all creation. This recognition of Christ the King has an eschatological dimension as well. This means that there is also a pointing to the end of time when the kingdom of Jesus will be established in all its fullness to the ends of the earth. As people living on earth now, it leads into Advent, when the Church anticipates Christ’s second coming. And there are a number of ways to understand this—Jesus’ story begins with his birth to Mary and Joseph yes—over 2000 years ago and this is the story we hear again at Christmas. But there is what Jesus taught his followers and what Paul writes to the young churches- Christ will come again! Believers in the early churches thought this would happen soon and were striving to be prepared and ready, but we are still waiting for Christ to return to earth! So as we prepare for Advent—it is not just preparing the food to celebrate Jesus’ birth in the stable, it is preparing our hearts to be open to receive the Christ who will come again one day.

Jesus reigns in the hearts of those who believe and those who believe are read to receive Christ! But how do we understand this today? Our reading from Matthew 25 focuses on the time when again the Son of Man will come with his angels and sit on his throne in judgment. Then and there everyone will gather and be separated like sheep and goats- sheep to the right; goats to the left. To those sheep on the right the king will bless them and they will ‘inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.’ To those on the left, they will be accursed and will depart from Him into eternal fire. Why the different directions and end plan for them? Because of what they did and did not do in their lives!

Many students of different disciplines may or may not like the words-“take home final exam” because of what these words mean for their workload and time commitment. At first, the idea of the take home sounds great as there is no time crunch, unlimited access to resources for checking facts and figures, ability to modify, or change, responses after thinking about them for a while. But with a take home final there is a down side to all those benefits. With all the extra time, unlimited information and fluid flexibility, there is also greater expectations and a never a firm answer to how much more the instructor expects. A longer, more extensive, more exhaustive presentation is rightly required as one has access to unlimited resources to give enough examples. But if given an exam in a closed classroom for 2-3 hours all students are put at the same advantages and disadvantages. It’s a level playing field. A “take home final” by definition will be “taken” to a different “home” by each student and forces students to take their exam in their individual real worlds — whatever those worlds might be like- quiet and peaceful or noisy with many distractions. In our reading from Matthew, Jesus makes it clear that Christian life comes with a take home final.

So what is on the test? Sharing and showing compassion and love to others in the ways of being human: to those who are hungry-giving food; to the thirsty- giving drink; welcoming all including strangers; giving clothes to those who are naked or cold; to those who are sick and taking care of them (nursing) (and not just physical illnesses), to those in prison whether incarcerated or unable to live alone or outside and being visited and cared for without seeking reward or recognition. It is living as Christ Jesus in our times.

Paul describes this in his letter to the Ephesians as: the eyes of your heart enlightened so you know what the hope is that you are called to share. It is also knowing what the riches of the inheritance of the saints is about- glory in God’s kingdom, and eternal life as well as what is greatness in power for believers. This means knowing Christ Jesus as the one who rules with authority, power and dominion and above all others.

The questions which will be asked on that day are simply: “What have you done?” “Do you really believe in Jesus Christ?” “What have you done for the least of these, my brothers and sisters,” this does not contradict the grace of God, that salvation is a pure gift.

As a child many of your parents probably had many tasks to do and your parents asked questions of you on a daily basis. “Have you done your homework? Are your chores done? Did you make your bed? Did you feed the cat? Did you load the dishwasher? When you became parents you asked similar questions for the times- homework done? Chores done? Practising

done? Cleaning your room? Just think about how many times you asked the, "Did you do the work that I gave you to do?" "What did you do today?"

The same is true of God because out of love God still asks us the question: Have you done your chores today? Did you do your chores today? Did you take care of the sick, the poor, the orphans, the starving, the thirsty, the refugees, the homeless, the hungry, lonely in the nursing homes? Have you done your chores today? Just like a parent to a child it shows how much one is loved. The same is true of God. Because God does love you unconditionally, God then asks you that question. Have you done your best for me?

On the right are the sheep/ on the left are the goats but what we are called to do makes a difference in the Christ's kingdom. Are you willing to respond to King? Julia Carney wrote these words in the mid-19th Century but they still speak to us today:

"Little drops of water, little grains of sand, make the mighty ocean and the beautiful land.

And the little moments, humble though they may be, make the mighty ages of eternity.

Little deeds of kindness, little words of love, make our earth an Eden, like the heaven above."

As we lift up our voices and give thanks to God for Jesus His Son who is our Saviour, Shepherd Christ and King what one story will you choose to tell others about Him?

A little boy wanted to meet God and he knew it would be a long trip to where God lived, so he packed a suitcase full of Twinkies and cans of root beer (his two favorite foods) and set off on his journey. He had only gone a few blocks when he passed an older woman, sitting on a park bench and just staring at some pigeons. She looked sad and lonely, so the boy went over and sat down next to her. He opened his suitcase, took out a package of the Twinkies and offered it to her. She gratefully took it and smiled at him. Her smile was so warm and wonderful that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a can of his root beer. Once again, she took it and smiled at him. The boy was delighted. They sat there all afternoon, eating the Twinkies, drinking the root beers and watching the pigeons, without saying a word to each other.

As it grew dark, the boy realized that he had better get started home and got up to leave. But before he had just a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the older woman and gave her a big hug. She gave him the biggest smile of all.

When the boy got home, his mother noticed how happy he seemed. So she asked him what he had done all day. He told her: "I had lunch with God. And you know what? She has the most beautiful smile that I've ever seen."

Meanwhile, the older woman had returned to her home. Her son also noticed how happy and contented she seemed so he asked her what she had done that had made her so happy. She said to him: "I sat in the park and ate Twinkies with God. You know, he's much younger than I expected."

When we Christ in others, they also see us for who we are. This is what we are called to do as faithful believers. But we are also asked to sing his praise and rejoice because He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Praise be to you O Christ!

PRAYER: God of grace and love we praise you for your gift to us in your Son Jesus our Saviour! We praise him and rejoice in the words of faith we say and sing to you. For Jesus is lord of our lives and the One who calls us to be one with each other in hope. God we praise you and as we shall sing these words today open our hearts and let us rejoice in faith.

Crown him with many crowns, The Lamb upon his throne; Hark how the heavenly anthem
drowns All music but its own.

A wake, my soul, and sing Of him who died for thee, And hail him as thy matchless king
Through all eternity.

Praise be to you O God. Amen,