

“Our Appointment With King Jesus”

Christ the King Sunday

November 23, 2014

Matthew 25:31-46

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! The text for this morning’s message is the Gospel lesson for this Christ the King Sunday which was just read.

33 years ago this Christ the King Sunday I stood in the pulpit for the very first time to preach on these very texts. My brother Mike had moved home to Wisconsin after the death of our father to serve as our Mother’s pastor. Rev. Dr. Dale Meyer had assigned the lessons for Christ the King Sunday hoping someone would give his Seminary 1 students the opportunity to preach over our Thanksgiving break. All the way home from St. Louis to Wautoma, WI, I practiced the sermon that I’d been given an “A” on by the future Lutheran Hour Speaker and present Seminary President. I was certain I could light a fire under the members of the 2 churches my brother served to go out and share Jesus. This was my shot and I was overly nervous as all first-time preachers are.

Probably not as nervous as the disciples were at the end of today’s parable when Jesus told them, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.” If the parables they’d just heard were a bit hard to grasp, that statement was more than clear, but as the Gospel record shows, even then Jesus’ disciples were pretty clueless.

Then, as now, end time prophecies and dark truths are difficult to absorb. The disciples didn’t want to believe Jesus would die – certainly didn’t know anything about a resurrection and it is likely they thought His talk about judgment was something that would happen with them seated in positions of power to His left and right. Yes, they were certain that Jesus, the Messiah, had a precious place for them in His Kingdom to come and they were waiting – as are we nearly 2000 years after this parable for our **“Appointment with King Jesus.”**

Appointments rule our lives. Whether it is going to the Dr. for yet another check-up, follow-up or for Physical Therapy, out to lunch with a friend, picking up prescriptions, attending a concert, Bible Study, rehearsal or going to the grocery store at the time we are certain is the least busy time of day our life follows the rhythm of our appointments. Which is why, I suppose,

this one is so irritating or easy to write off. Typing “End of the World” to repeat daily into the planner on your phone or computer or writing it “old-style” 365 time in your Franklin Calendar just isn’t going to happen – it seems too unreal, far-fetched and far off.

Not so to the disciples – especially after Jesus was crucified two days later. How they must have wondered what this parable meant. The picture Jesus paints is one of order – a scene they’d seen countless times as they’d wandered Palestine following their Master. At the end of each day the sheep and goats are separated. Why? Sheep are fussy and very community oriented, they don’t sleep well unless they are huddled together, don’t eat in the pasture unless they can see another sheep from their flock, while goats are independent, always going off on their own, fidgety and forever butting heads and they really get on the nerves of sheep at night. That is why they are separated in an orderly fashion.

This is also a scene of splendor and majesty with the King on the Throne surrounded by all His angels – “ranks and dominions” to borrow an image from the writer of Hebrews. Truly, “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord” on that Judgment Day just as Paul told the Romans but our friend Ezekiel – well, the Israelites of his day loved the character of their king, not just the pomp and circumstance – they embraced the person of a “shepherd-king.” “Shepherd Kings” of Ezekiel’s time did not so much rule over their people, as they protected them, served them and led them. Shepherd-kings, like all royalty, I suppose, were accorded the honor that attended their station in life, but they also understood their job-description where nothing was beneath their dignity and nothing was above their pay grade. Shepherd-kings got down and dirty as they led their flocks to food and water. Shepherd-kings had soft hands from the lanolin in the wool but probably smelled like sheep – a good thing for the best shepherd – to smell familiar because sheep are comforted by familiar smells just as they are by a familiar voice – the voice of the shepherd. There is no better model for leadership, in government, in business, in the family, in the community and in the church – we must all be willing to do whatever work needs to be done – and to be thankful for the opportunity.

It has always been a comfort to me to know that on that most final of all days in strange surroundings we will hear the voice of a friend and turning to that voice realize it belongs to the King – the King of Love, the Prince of Peace. Like a child who knows the voices of their parents before they are born into this world you will know the voice of Jesus – turn to it in faith, humble trust and love because the voice of God first spoke to you, came to you in the gift of faith, the

waters of baptism and declared you righteous. While a “self-righteous” person always thinks they’re right the truly righteous heirs of King Jesus have literally been “made right with God.” We have been “made right with God” by the righteousness Jesus earned on our behalf.

This blessing of righteousness by faith will be no more evident than on the day of our appointment with King Jesus. On that day we will hear and see the different way that our King sees and deals with the righteous and the unrighteous – and it’s more than the syllable “un.” Looking at the unrighteous the King will announce all the things they haven’t done: “I was hungry and you didn’t feed me, I was thirsty and you didn’t give me anything to drink.” You didn’t do this, you forgot that, you weren’t there every time you could have been and should have been – and because you weren’t people went hungry, strangers went homeless, and people in prison despaired. The standard of judgment will be all the things done wrong or left undone.

Can anyone stand up to that judgment? Would any of us stand the test of always being available, always helping? No – not one! Our righteousness is like dirty rags – but we are covered by the righteousness of Jesus Christ and our lives are viewed quite differently – all that is, was, will be wrong is forgiven and instead God sees only the deeds of love we have done in response to this great gift God has given us – the opportunities we have seized by God’s grace. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ every act of love, every glass of water for the neighborhood kids, each strong warm handshake for a suffering friend, every hour spent with any person in need – any person of any faith or creed – all of them in need of Christ’s love and provision through you and the sharing of your time, talents, and treasures, is seen as an act of love done to Christ Himself.

You will be amazed on that Judgment Day at all the times God has used you. Being free from the pressure of trying to earn our own righteousness we, together, a flock, like sheep in need of companionship and comfort can look to the needs of the lost world around us and actively work together, encouraging and lifting one another up as we reach out to meet the needs of those who have yet to meet Jesus and those who need to hear again that He is their Savior and friend. After all, our appointment with the King could be any day and there are many people left to tell many people in desperate need, many people who do not know of our Good and Gracious King - people who are not ready for their appointment, for that great and glorious day that is to come. It’s as an old verse from Amazing Grace says,

This earth will soon dissolve like snow; this sun refuse to shine.
Then He who kept me here below will be forever mine.

Until that day when we hear King Jesus call us by name and turn in humble awe to see our Savior face-to-face may God grant us the grace to seek the lost, to serve without counting the cost and to be joyfully about God's work! AMEN