

“SEEING JESUS”  
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Christ the King Sunday

Matthew 25:31-46

There's been so much going on in the news this week - the stock market ups and downs, the big three auto makers going to Washington, the selection of cabinet members for the new administration, and so on - so much that you might have missed a news items coming out of Great Britain a few days ago. Prince Charles celebrated his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, and his mother had a party for him.

I did read some articles about it, and they were pretty interesting. Apparently Charles has had one of the longest reigns of “king-in-waiting” in British history. In other words, he's been the heir to the throne now for sixty years, with no end in sight, since his mother, Queen Elizabeth, seems hale and hearty. The articles talked about what a strange predicament that is for him - sure, he'd like to be king, but in order for that to happen it would mean the death of his mother.

And there was much speculation that, since her mother lived to be over a hundred, the Queen herself might have a while to go yet, so Charles might well be in his eighties, before he ascends to the throne (which led other writers to suggest that he might want to just skip it altogether, and pass the royal scepter right over to his son, Prince William).

As you know, the monarchy is a big deal in Great Britain. For hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of year, that country has had a king or queen. So when you consider that the office has passed down in the family from generation to generation, you've got to figure that that family has a pretty good thing going. And, if you've ever visited England, you know they do.

Palaces to beat the band - Buckingham, Windsor, Kensington, St. James - the list goes on and on. And then there are country estates like Balmoral. There are legions of guards, an army, navy and air force. There are subjects of all types - royal and not so royal.

And then there's the wealth - lots and lots and lots of it. I will never forget getting a look at the Crown Jewels at the Tower of London when I visited England. Unbelievable, dazzling, worn-once-a-year, if they're lucky, jewels!

And oh yes, there's that little thing of having people bow and curtsy in their presence, and speaking to them only when the royals speak first. Quite a set-up they've got, those royals! What a kingdom they've got going for them! Power, possessions, wealth, position - that's what their kingdom looks like this very day.

Well friends, we've come here today because we live in a kingdom too, but it's about as different from that kingdom as you can get. We're here because we are part of the kingdom of God under the reign of Christ the King. And this is, as I said earlier, Christ the King Sunday. It is the last Sunday of the Christian year - a sort-of wrap-up Sunday for the year.

The Christian year starts with Advent - looking forward to the birth of the Savior in the manger in Bethlehem. It continues through the seasons of Christmas, then Epiphany and Lent, before we turn to the celebration of Jesus' resurrection at Easter. Then we move through the season of Pentecost, during which we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit and the forming of the church. And then, at the very end of the season of Pentecost, comes today - Christ the King Sunday - a reminder that the bottom line of the whole year is this - Christ reigns over all. Period.

And this is what Christ's kingdom looks like. Pretty much the exact opposite of the one I described earlier. It's not about having vast holdings and possessions - in Christ's kingdom, it's about using the things we've been given to care for others. And it's not about force and power, it's about compassion and caring. And it's not about heaping up wealth, it's about giving it away. And it's not about having people bow and scrape before you, it's about bending down to care for others. Christ's kingdom is not at all like the kingdoms of this world.

In an article about Christ's kingdom, C. Welton Gaddy put it this way: "Jesus holds not a scepter for recognition, but a towel for service. Rather than demanding that people bow before him, Jesus stoops before people to wash their feet, cool their fevered brows, touch their sores, and ease their pains. Instead of commanding a well-armed militia to make war, Jesus commissions a scraggly group of common folk to spread the gospel of peace. Jesus prefers giving away everything he has to the poor, to collecting taxes. Oh yes, and the only throne from which Jesus reigns is a cross." (Clergy Journal, Nov. 2008, p. 35)

That's what Jesus' kingdom looks like, and today's Gospel lesson makes no bones about asking us where you and I are in the life of that kingdom. Jesus makes it very clear that if we are to be His followers, we will do as He has done - feed the hungry, house the homeless, and visit those who are sick or in prison.

What does it take to live like that? Well, I want to suggest to you this morning that in order to live faithfully in the kingdom of God under the reign of

Christ we need to do two things: 1) see through the eyes of Christ, and 2) see Christ in the eyes of others.

The kings and queens of this world look at others and see them as subjects, people who are there to do their bidding and make their lifestyle possible. Christ the King looks at others through the eyes of love. He sees people as individuals, blessed, cherished, uniquely created children of God - each one important in his/her own way. Christ sees people as worthy just because of who they are, not because they have better, higher paying jobs than anyone else, or because they live in better neighborhoods, drive better cars, have more degrees on their walls. Christ looks through the eyes of love and simply sees beloved sons and daughters of God.

It takes some doing to see people as Jesus saw them. We've grown too accustomed to looking at appearances and judging people. We've gotten accustomed to looking at what they're wearing, and looking to see how clean they are, or listening to what language they're speaking. We're so in tune with the things the world calls important, that too often we look right past the fact that they are just like us - sinners standing in need of grace, beloved sons and daughters of our Creator God.

And that's bad, but what's worse, is that, too often these days, we don't even see them!

A pastor named Thomas Lane Butts could tell you about that. Every summer he went to New York to teach, and this is what happened to him, in his own words. He writes: "When I go to New York each summer, I am always devastated by the number of homeless people. They are everywhere! The first week I am there (he says), I fill my pockets with change and small bills before I leave the apartment each day. My friends laugh at me for handing out money to the homeless, but I just cannot help it. But, something strange happens about the middle of my second week there. Suddenly, I do not notice the homeless people very much anymore - and that really bothers me."(on-line, "The Light Never Turns Green," Thomas Lane Butts)

It happens so easily. We get wrapped up in our little worlds, our own little kingdoms, that we don't see each other, and certainly don't see Christ in each other. Joe Garagiola, who many of you will remember was a major league baseball catcher and then worked for a lot of years on NBC TV, once told about a day when he walked into a drugstore in New York City to buy some things. He filled his shopping basket and went to the counter to pay for the items. One by one he put them on the conveyor belt - a big bottle of Extra-Strength tylenol, a knee brace, some rubbing alcohol, a bottle of Dristan, a hot-water bottle, a vaporizer, some Polygrip, and various other items. He said that after the clerk checked him out and

took his money, he could not believe it when the clerk handed him back his change, handed him the sack of stuff, and with a great big grin on his face, said “Have a nice day!” Have a nice day!!!! You see, too often we close our eyes to the suffering of others, and we gloss over what they’re going through - we’re just too busy.

Jesus bids us to stop and see and care - for those are the marks of His kingdom, His reign in the world. Stop and see and care. Make a difference in the life of somebody else. Show somebody else that they matter. Show them that somebody cares about them.

You know, it doesn’t have to be a big deal. I was talking to the staff the other day about this passage, and I told them about somebody that I think lives this Gospel lesson every day - and that’s the guy that sits at the bottom of the Bridge Street bridge every afternoon and waves at all the cars going by. Is that a big deal? No, it’s not, but yes, it is. I love driving by him and waving back. He makes me feel good, and from the reactions I got around the staff circle the other day, I think he makes a lot of people feel good. He just sits there and smiles and waves, but he’s waving to people who are harried and hassled and worried and worn, and for just a brief moment, he makes us feel like a million dollars and that everything’s going to be all right. He sees through the eyes of Jesus, and when I look at him, I see Christ.

I invite you to start looking around you, because you too will see Christ, maybe when you least expect it. Jim Wallis, of Sojourners tells of one morning when some volunteers who were getting ready to feed the hungry in a soup kitchen gathered together to say a prayer before they greeted the long line of hungry people outside their door. The woman who said the prayer prayed something Jim says he will never forget. She prayed this: “Jesus, help me to see your face when you come through the line today.”

You know what, if we stop long enough to look at others, and even more, to care for others as Christ the King cared for them, we will see Christ in their faces. Maybe it will be this week as some in this church work at the Rotating Homeless Shelter. (By the way, a lot more help is needed. There are a lot of slots that haven’t been filled, and Terri Lokey will be downstairs in the hospitality area to sign you up if you can help.)

So some will see Christ at the Homeless Shelter. And some will see Christ right here on Thanksgiving Day as the hungry are fed. And some will see Christ when they sit down across the table from a family member and give thanks over dinner. And some will see Christ in a turnpike rest stop while traveling “over the river and through the woods to grandmother’s house.”

Some will see Christ as they visit the sick, or someone in prison. Some will

see Christ as they take scarves and mittens and hats to the Help Center, Some will see Christ as they take a meal to someone who is sick or grieving. And some will see Christ as they teach a child, or coach a team. Some will even see Christ as they turn to grab a hand and sing “Bind Us Together.”

Christ reigns over the Kingdom of God - here and now - and we are blessed to be a part of that kingdom. If we accept His invitation to do as He did, those we care for will be blessed, we will be blessed, and the world will be as it should be. May it be so.

Amen.