



Sermon for Christ the King Sunday, November 2020

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Ezekiel 34:11-16,20-24](#) [Matthew 25:31-46](#)

We turn now to Christ, who is far above all nations and powers, who will judge the nations and peoples of the earth, whose body we are in this world, whose fullness fills all things. Amen.

We are at the end of this year! In the Church, this is our last Sunday of the church calendar year.

Next Sunday begins a new Church year with the beginning of Advent.

So, Happy New Year!

And what a year to bring to an end and leave behind! This year, 2020, will live in our memories for a long, long time. We shall see whether or not we learn any lessons from it, we stubborn humans.

As a Church, we bring to an end a year that began last Advent. And it comes to a conclusion on this Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, when we mark with hope the vision of the return of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We trust and hope – and put ourselves behind this amazing home – that history and the march of time will draw to a great final conclusion, with all things drawn together under the reign of God, when the kingdom of God finally arrives in fullness, when there is a new beginning, a new heaven and a new earth.

So, Happy New Year! Happy Day of Christ the King! Happy Day of All Things Made New.

We have one Lord, and it is not Caesar. We have only one that we accept as our ultimate ruler, who is also our ultimate guide and friend, who is the lover of all humankind and all creation. And, it is not any president or monarch or power-group. It is most certainly not Donald Trump. It is not Joe Biden. It is no one in this nation or any nation. No, it is the One who is God-with-Us, Emmanuel, the Lord of Life and Prince of Peace.

I love these scriptures for today. The prophet Ezekiel points to a promised saving, redeeming, rescuing judgment of God among the people of Israel. God will not abandon God's people. God promises, and says, "I will search for you. I will rescue you. I will bring you out from scattered

places and gather you and bring you home. I will feed you and give you safe rest. I will be your shepherd. I will seek the lost and bring back the wayward. I will heal. I will strengthen. AND, I will judge. Some of you have mistreated others and taken advantage of your privilege and pushed out the weaker ones. You fattened ones will be judged for this. I will judge between sheep and sheep.”

This is the promise of God, that for Israel there shall be a great, wise, caring, justice-setting ruler rise up who will attend to each one. God’s care here is for the whole flock of sheep, but is also very personal with specific care for each sheep depending on its condition and behavior.

Jesus pulls from this core image of God and of the Messiah that is deep in the hearts of the people of Israel, in the parable we hear today. This is the great culminating teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. In this, Jesus is pointing to the great end of history, when the Son of Man comes in glory to take the throne. And then, the nations will be gathered before him – the nations, not just the people as a bunch of individuals, and not just the rulers of the nations, but the nations. Whole peoples, whole groups, whole tribes and clans and ethnic groups and nation-states and empires. Christ’s judgment is of whole peoples.

We will stand before God, not just as individuals, but as whole nations and groups. And the judgment of Christ comes down to this: How did you care for one another?

Ask yourselves. Where does the United States stand before God now? Where are we sorted?

Jesus was tested by the religious rulers. They asked him what was the greatest commandment. He said this: “First, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And, second, love your neighbor as yourself.”

How does this nation, the United States, uphold these commandments? How are we doing as a nation and as various groups within that nation? How are our rulers doing? How are we as citizens doing?

The first and greatest of the commandments is not “Love yourself above all others, and love only those who fawn over you.” The second great commandment is not “Love others by telling them to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.”

It’s interesting in the parable of the sorting of the nations like a shepherd sorts sheep from goats – neither group seems to know what Jesus is talking about, and both groups ask the same question. “Lord, when were you here? When was it we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison?” Neither seemed to be aware that it was Jesus they were seeing.

So, the nations and peoples who act with steady caring and giving – even to those who don’t seem to deserve it – and even though they do not recognize Jesus who is within and surrounding and alongside these needy and neglected ones – these are the nations that are blessed and will join in the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. These nations don’t know that it is Christ the Lord of Life to whom they are offering care and love.

Likewise, the nations and peoples who neglect life's unfortunate souls – victims of others' abuse of power or of terrible circumstances or of their own decisions – and the nations and peoples who blame such people for their own circumstances and treat them with shame and outright dismissal – these are the nations that are cursed and cast out from God's kingdom. These nations don't know that it is Christ the Lord of Life that they are ignoring, neglecting, shaming, and further punishing.

It would be easy to read this as a sorting of individuals, and then ask ourselves, "How am I doing?" And then, we will see how each one of us falls short. But we can't lift the burdens of everyone around us, on our own. We need each other. This is what that old poem about the horseshoe nail is all about.

"For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe, the horse was lost. For want of a horse, the rider was lost. For want of a rider, the battle was lost. For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost, And all for the want of a horseshoe nail."

This gets to the heart of how Christ sits in judgment of the nations. Every person matters. And, the total effort together is what makes the difference. We build a nation of peace, justice, and steady unwavering care together – or, we don't. But the question remains, "Lord, when were you here?"

This is a question we can ask ourselves at the end of this year. "Lord, where are you that I am not seeing?"

And the second question is like it: "Does it matter if I think I can see Jesus or not? Am I – and are we – giving to others with the kind of love that Jesus is calling us to give? Am I willing to meet each person as if I was meeting the living Christ, the Lord of Life and Prince of Peace?"

Choose this day whom you will serve. Christ awaits, among the blessed who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who are the strangers and outcasts and hungry.

Christ is calling. Maybe where we serve is truly where Christ reigns and where the kingdom of heaven opens wide.

Let this coming Advent, and this coming year, be rich with giving and caring for others all around us. Let us all do our part to call our nation to a different way, the Way of Love. We are Christ's body, and we meet Christ at every turn. And, living this way, Christ truly becomes all in all.

Amen.