



# *Christ the King Sunday*

## *Sermon by Revd Sharmain James*



26 November 2023

### READINGS

Ezekiel 34:11-16,20-24; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

## *How we will be judged.*

Today the church's liturgical year comes to an end. On it we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, completing the re-telling of God's great story through Jesus - that we undertake in our worship and reflection every year. Next week we will begin a new church year with the season of Advent. Since our Church year revolves around the life of Jesus Christ, it is fitting that the church uses its last Sunday in hailing our Lord and Savior as King of all creation.

In today's Gospel, we are looking at Jesus' story of the final judgment, where Jesus describes people of all nations being separated as sheep from goats based on their service to the least of these.

When I was a child, I was taught that this teaching of Jesus is about who gets into heaven and doesn't. I used to understand today's gospel reading - as a calling to be people who feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, hospitality to the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoner.

This is what God wants from us. And this is how we will be judged. More than that, - I use to believe that - the people we are supposed to care for, was everyone and anyone who might need food, drink, care, or a visit. I believed this was a universal call to all people to care for all people. This makes it easy to approach this passage as sort of a manual for getting into heaven -- is care for all of those around you who are in need.

But one thing I find interesting in today's reading from Matthew chapter 25 - is that both the sheep and goats are completely ignorant of what they have done. When Jesus praises the righteous for doing all these beautiful works - they look around at each other and then, dumbfounded, ask, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick and in prison and go to visit you?" Likewise, the goats ask the same questions... when did we see you in need and ignore you?

That is the crux of the story: "Lord, when was it that we SAW you hungry, or thirsty. when was it that we SAW you as a stranger or naked, . . . SAW you sick or in prison?"

The biggest surprise in Jesus' description is that whenever the poor are clothed, the hungry are fed, the sick are tended to, the outcasts are welcomed, the "least of these" are cared for, we learn that we're not caring for them, we are caring for Jesus. And whenever we don't do those things, we are neglecting Jesus.

The king we claim to follow tells us that we will see him in the people we least expect, and he won't look anything like an earthly king or ruler. If we can't see the image of Christ in these unexpected people, then we're missing something essential. In fact, we are missing out on God's presence among us in a crucial way. What would happen if we began to really see Christ in others, - and then treat them the way we would treat God in Christ?

Jesus cares so much about what we see. It is too easy to read this story and see the poor, the vulnerable, the sick, the prisoners not as real people, but as pawns in a story that will determine the eternal destiny of everyone else. If anything separates the sheep and the goats in this story it seems to be that the sheep refuse to see the "needy" as only "players" in the story that will determine their own eternal destiny. They are simply friends who deserve dignity. Friends who have something to offer. And friends who, yes, may need some care.

And what we see is often so affected by what we want to see, what we might be looking for, what we focus on. Jesus is always trying to help us see better – see God's plans, God's ways, God's purposes. In fact, Jesus wants us to learn how to see so we can work with God on healing the fractures of the world. Jesus wants us to learn how to see so we can be God's agents – moving our lives, moving the world, closer to what God intends.

Our king calls us to see and serve him in the least of these. We can start today by making a spiritual practice of seeing Jesus in his most distressing disguises and then serving Christ in those in need.

In doing so, we will discover that we are changed and blessed.

AMEN