

Sermon: Christ the King

The Rev. Mike Wernick

November 26, 2017

Year A

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Psalm 95:1-7a

Ephesians 1:15-23

Matthew 25:31-46

We began Advent two weeks ago... a new beginning... a new year... a time of preparation... of watchfulness... of waiting... but not of waiting only for the Christmas babe... not waiting just for the Christmas babe... but waiting for the fulfillment of God's plan for all of creation... for completion... for fulfillment so full... that nothing else could be added...

We began Advent two weeks ago... hearing about Wisdom herself... and about wise and foolish bridesmaids... about how the foolish had what the world would consider reasonable Wisdom... and about how the Wise had exceptional... over-the-top... anticipating every possible eventuality... Wisdom... it seems intuitive... simply knowing what each moment... what each circumstance needs... what needs to be done... and just how it needs to be done... what needs to be said... and just how it needs to be said... in that moment... this time... the right thing this time... but perhaps not the same words next time... perhaps said differently... or a slightly nuanced action... but responding seamlessly... without hesitation... with spontaneous right action...

It reminds me of Matthew 10... when Jesus says... *See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. And when they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say... for what you are to say will be given to you at that time... by the Spirit... by Wisdom... you will simply know...*

Last week... we heard the parable about the talents... about what one servant did with five talents... that's one hundred years worth of wages by the way... another with two talents... and the last one... with one... I suggested at this past Wednesday's morning

Eucharist... that while we tend to think of the main character in the story... like the vineyard owner... as God... perhaps we can discern additional Wisdom... additional meaning... by another approach...

As Fr. Dennis McBride... of Scotland... wrote... it's easy to see the last servant as lazy... unwilling to take risks... unwilling to use his God-given abilities... as someone who is afraid of his master... remember... he says... *Master... I knew that you were a harsh man... reaping where you did not sow... and gathering where you did not scatter seed... so I was afraid... and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here... you have what is yours...* but this is not the God I know...

But what if... as Fr. McBride suggests... the God-character... the prophet... the hero... maybe even Jesus himself... is the last servant... and what if the Master... is the greedy corporate CEO... the man who built barns... interested in nothing more than turning a profit... after all... he did not deny the allegations levied against him... he simply said that his money ought to have been invested with the bank... so he could have earned interest... encouraged usury... from those who needed loans to pay their bills... what if the last servant... is the one who shines a light on evil... who calls it by its own name... and who does so in public so that others know what's going on...

McBride wrote... look at Martin Luther King, Jr... people complained that everywhere he went he fomented violence... but in reality... King just uncovered the violence and injustice hidden below the surface... injustice that was all too familiar to the African Americans who were routinely denied their basic rights... consider Rosa Parks... who by refusing to co-operate with racism... uncovered the evil hidden in plain sight... she is the woman spoken of in Proverbs... *she reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy...*

And when you tell the truth... when you speak truth to power... when you threaten the *status quo*... when you are a whistleblower... when you cheer for the contents of the

Magnificat... don't you risk being ostracized... risk unemployment... don't you risk being thrown into the outer darkness of exile... where those in power want you to gnash your teeth... isn't that what happens... to prophets...

Fr. Robert Capon wrote about today's Gospel... in the Great Judgment... all of the scenes of Jesus' earlier parables come full circle... in this parable... Jesus goes out of his way to stipulate that the Son of Man... will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats... Jesus is the Good Shepherd and the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... but he lays down his life for the goats as well... because on the cross he draws ALL people to himself... it is not that the sheep are his... but the goats are not... the sheep are His sheep... and the goats are His goats...

And so Jesus' drawing ALL to himself... remains the ultimate gravitational force in the universe... nothing... not even evil... is ever exempt from it... hell doesn't have a choice... but to be within the power of the final party... even though it refuses to act as if it is AT the party... it lies not so much outside the festivities... as it is sequestered within them... it may even go downstairs to sulk... it is hidden... if you will... in the spear wound in Christ's side... to keep it from being a wet blanket on the heavenly proceedings... but it is not... for all that... any less a part of Jesus' catholic shepherding of his flock...

It seems as though being open to Wisdom... seems as though having Wisdom... having our lives directed by Wisdom.. would be easy... after all... Wisdom says... that she is easily discerned by those who love her... she is found by those who seek her... she hastens to make herself known to those who desire her... for she will be found sitting at the gate... but it's not easy... not at all... not most of the time... not when we put ourselves... our egos... our wants... our desires... first... maybe this is why Paul wrote... *I do not understand my own actions... for I do not do what I want... but I do the*

very thing I hate... for I do not do the good I want... but the evil I do not want... is what I do...

To 21st century ears... the language of Christ the King Sunday can sound like a heavy-handed... hierarchical hold-over from our patriarch dominated past... and yet it makes perfect sense when you realize it was established only recently... in response to the growing fascist movement in Europe... when the Anglican Church... Lutherans... Presbyterians... and Methodists added this Feast Day to their lectionary...

What is it... for Jesus to stand against Empire... and what does that leadership look like... generally... our human response to someone of great spiritual authenticity is to venerate them... even if titles and hierarchies are not important to them... so we can conclude that Jesus' "Kingship" does not involve domination or triumphalism — but the radical, all-powerful compassion and love of Jesus seeking justice for all...

Christ the King... is King of the Kingdom of Heaven... and this kingdom is characterized by certain values... which were given a voice six days ago... as The Boston Declaration was signed... a document signed by over 300 Christian theologians who attended the American Academy of Religion's annual meeting... and which condemned the abuse of the Christian faith by many conservatives...

In a dramatic press conference at Boston's famous Old South Church... many dressed in sackcloth and ashes... to call for repentance and change in U.S. Christianity... the presenters claimed that white American Evangelicalism is in a crisis... a crisis of its own making... because it has abandoned the Gospel of Jesus Christ...

The Rev. Susan Thistlethwaite... Professor of Theology and President Emerita of Chicago Theological Seminary... wrote... when we have torch carrying right-wing radicals marching around in Charlottesville, Virginia yelling "blood and soil!" and "Jews

will not replace us!" ... it's time to confront this kind of Nazism with the historical courage of those who confronted the Nazis in the 1930s in Germany...

Dietrich Bonhoeffer... the German Lutheran pastor... who was arrested and ultimately executed by the Nazis for his opposition to Hitler... contrasted what he called "cheap grace" with the costly grace of the Gospel...

Cheap grace means grace sold like flea market wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion... are thrown away at cut-rate prices... grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury... from which she showers blessings with generous hands... without asking questions... or fixing limits... thinking there can be community without accountability...

The Christianity Bonhoeffer denounced... is the same Christianity that was denounced on November 20... it is a Christianity that literally enables hate... hate for people of color... for immigrants... for those of other religions... for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender human beings... for the women and girls who wrote "Me Too" on their FaceBook pages... and for the poor and the most vulnerable among us...

And why do these so-called Christians do this? Not out of obedience to the teachings of Jesus... because Jesus taught the exact opposite of their hate-mongering... No... they do it for power... to cement authority... for political gain... and yet Jesus asks, "What does it profit you to gain the whole world... if you lose your soul?"

But those who signed this Declaration... also did so to announce the Good News of the Gospel... the good news is the radical inclusivity of God... for God so loved the world... not just those who are white... or rich... or male... or heterosexual... God loved the whole world of animals and plants and the entire ecosystem... which is a victim of this same rapacious and nearly mindless drive for political domination...

The Good News... and it is very good news... is that we are invited to turn away from greed... and turn toward love of neighbor. Turn away from hate... and turn towards love... radical love and radical hospitality...

Jesus said... "Love one another." And we say, "Amen, our King."

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