

# Christ The King Sunday

November 22, 2020

Sermon by Rev. Zachary W. Johnson

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church

Pasadena, California

## Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>31</sup>“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.’ <sup>41</sup>Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup>Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

## **SERMON by Pastor Zach Johnson**

Today is Christ the King Sunday. As we end our liturgical year, as we prepare for the joyous expectation of Advent (which begins next week!), we take time today to celebrate that Christ



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Jesus defeated death and has ushered in a new reign that is grounded in grace, mercy, and love. The kingdom or kin-dom of God is here and now and we are free to live in it.

To live in the kin-dom of God that Christ ushered in through his death and resurrection, is to live out our baptismal vocations in all aspects of daily life. It is to live a life of mercy towards others. Of course, we have already been freed to live this life of mercy because of our baptism.

Through baptism Christ Jesus has already separated us from those who are on the left; baptism makes us sheep and not goats. In baptism God washes away the old self, the self that became separated from God due to sin. After our washing we are anointed with the sign of the cross on our foreheads, which is a permanent mark that can never be removed. The sign of that cross reminds us that we are forever beloved children of God. After the washing we are also blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Having the Holy Spirit abide with us helps us to learn about Christ's love and mercy; it helps us to have a forgiving heart; it helps us to live a life of mercy towards others, for it reminds us of Christ's commandment to love others.

Our gospel story today is not about giving us the power to claim who are sheep and who are goats. Christ Jesus is the world judge who ultimately decides the sheep and the goats. Instead, this gospel story is a reminder to us that we live in the kingdom prepared for us, a kingdom that is grounded in love and mercy.

But the truth of the matter is that it can be really hard for us to live in Christ's kingdom of love and mercy. Even though the kingdom is here and now, it isn't fully realized. Because of this, the poison of sin can still infect us. We all have days when love and mercy towards others is far from our minds. We are often affected by the poison of sin through things like consumerism which tries to turn our focus from God to material wealth. We are also affected by individualism that tries to convince us that the only person who matters is me, myself, and I. And let us not forget the sinful poison of tribalism. Tribalism tries to convince us that if a person doesn't support the same sports team, political party, or other organizations/entities as us, they are automatically our enemy and we must hate them. Finally, sin also tries to penetrate us through discriminating against other people in some way.

The truth of the matter is that, even though we've been baptized and have been marked with the cross of Christ forever; even though the gift of baptism reminds us that we are forever God's beloved child, the means of sin work very hard to make us forget our true identity and the fact that we live in God's kingdom of love and mercy here and now.



Thankfully, God works just as hard, if not harder, to shower us with love, grace, and mercy, so we are reminded that we have already inherited God's kingdom here and now. For example, our Sunday morning liturgy is full of God's presence as all parts of our liturgy point us to God's works of love and grace. Whether we are confessing our sins or giving thanks for baptism, we are greeted at the baptismal font with the reminder that we are God's beloved and cannot lose that identity to sin. The hymns we sing during worship are full of words and melodies that proclaim God's love for us. Our scripture readings and the sermon point us to what God was doing in biblical times, as well as what God is doing in our lives today, a proclamation of love. In the prayers we are reminded of the needs of the world and how God empowers us to respond to those needs because we have been freed to do so. When we come to the table for Holy Communion, we eat the bread of life and drink the cup of salvation. What better way to remind us that we abide in loving relationship with Jesus than to ingest the Lord of the universe. When we eat of this bread and drink from this cup, we are opening our whole being to the presence of Christ, who then becomes a part of us! Holy Communion is a means of grace that reminds us that Christ Jesus is forever Immanuel, "God with us."

But God doesn't just use our Sunday liturgy to remind us of God's kingdom here and now. God also uses all of us who make up the body of Christ. Each one of us is the physical presence of God's love in this world. God gives us a faith community who will be there to pray for us, support us in many and various ways, to encourage us, and to work alongside us so that we are not alone in living a life of love and mercy.

It is true that we face an enormous task in trying to convince the rest of the world that God's kingdom is here and now, and that we all have been freed from sin to live a life of love and mercy towards each other. Thankfully God will be ever present with us, so that we don't forget that we have already been claimed as sheep, so that we are reminded that we have been freed to live a life of love and mercy because of the amazing grace God has shown us through the cross and the empty tomb.

Today we celebrate and give thanks that Christ Jesus is our king, that we live in Christ's kingdom here and now, and that we are invited to share in the mission of spreading God's love and mercy in our broken world, so that others will come to know the love of God and the freedom of being in Christ's kingdom.

Amen.

