

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY
11-22-2020
MATTHEW 25:31-46

HERE WE GATHER THIS LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR - WE COME ON THE NEWS OF A HURTING ECONOMY, WE COME WITH HEALTH ISSUES, WE COME IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC, WE COME WITH JOBS THAT MAY OR MAY NOT BE GREAT, WE COME, TO HEAR A WORD OF HOPE AND COMFORT FROM THE LORD.

AND THE WORD, AT LEAST FROM THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW THIS MORNING IS THIS "HE WILL COME AGAIN IN GLORY TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD" WE SAY THOSE WORDS SO EASILY IN THE CREED MOST SUNDAY MORNINGS THAT WE DON'T STOP TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY MEAN. THIS MORNING, BEFORE WE RECITE OUR BAPTISMAL BELIEFS IN THE CREEDAL STATEMENT WE MAKE, PERHAPS WE SHOULD PONDER THOSE WORDS ANEW.

IMAGINE THE NATIONS GATHERED BEFORE JESUS. THE LIVING AND THE RESURRECTED DEAD WILL BE THERE - YOU'LL BE THERE - I'LL BE THERE. FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS AND CLASSMATES WILL BE THERE. AND THE LORD HIMSELF WILL SEPARATE THEM FROM ONE ANOTHER AS A SHEPHERD SEPARATES THE SHEEP FROM THE GOATS. THOSE AT HIS RIGHT WILL INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE, THOSE ON HIS LEFT WILL GO TO ETERNAL PUNISHMENT - HELL.

WITH ALL THE THINGS WE HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT, MUST WE NOW WORRY ABOUT WHETHER WE ARE IN OR OUT, SHEEP OR GOAT, SAVED OR UNSAVED? WELL, YOU CAN IF YOU WANT TO BUT IT'S NOT THE POINT - THERE REALLY IS GOOD NEWS IN THESE VERSES.

"THE SON OF MAN WILL COME IN GLORY, SEATED ON HIS THRONE". NO MISTAKING WHO HE IS THIS TIME, OR THAT HE IS IN CHARGE. TODAY IS CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY. A DAY TO AFFIRM THAT NO MATTER WHAT DIFFICULTIES WE MAY FACE PERSONALLY, OR WHAT CRISIS BEFALL US COLLECTIVELY, ***GOD STILL REIGNS - HIS KINGDOM WILL COME!*** BUT HOW CAN I KNOW IF I WILL BE A PART OF THAT KINGDOM? ST. MATTHEW HELPS US OUT BY DESCRIBING THE FINAL JUDGEMENT.

THE FIRST THING THAT STRUCK ME, IS THAT THE SEPARATION OF PEOPLE HAPPENS **BEFORE** ANY TALK OF DEEDS DONE, OR WHAT THE BASIS OF THE SEPARATION IS.

IN SCRIPTURE, GOD'S PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS REFERRED TO AS SHEEP, NOT GOATS. THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, WHO LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THEM. BEFORE THEY KNOW WHAT THEY HAVE DONE, THESE SHEEP ARE TOLD...

"COME YOU WHO ARE BLESSED BY MY FATHER, TAKE YOUR INHERITANCE, THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU, SINCE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD."

IT'S NOT THE GOOD DEEDS THAT GAIN THEM ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM. THEY DON'T EARN THE KINGDOM, THEY **INHERIT** IT. INHERITANCE IS DETERMINED BY THE GIVER, NOT THE RECEIVER.

AND NOTICE HOW SURPRISED THESE SHEEP ARE - THEY HADN'T KEPT SCORE, HADN'T KNOWN THEIR OWN GOOD DEEDS, THEY HELPED OTHERS SIMPLY BECAUSE GOD HAD FIRST HELPED THEM.

BUT THE GOATS ARE SURPRISED, TOO, AREN'T THEY? SEE, THEY **DID** KEEP SCORE - THEY KNEW HOW MUCH THEY HELPED AND GAVE - THEY MADE SURE THEIR PICTURE MADE IT INTO THE PAPER. AND WHAT COMPELLED THEM WASN'T THE FACT THAT GOD FIRST LOVED THEM, BUT THE DESIRE TO BE RECOGNIZED AND APPLAUDED THEIR EFFORTS.

FOR THE SHEEP IT'S ABOUT GOD AND OTHERS, FOR THE GOATS, IT'S ALL ABOUT SELF.

BUT JESUS SAYS "JUST AS YOU DID IT FOR THE LEAST OF THESE WHO ARE MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY, YOU DID IT TO ME."

SEE, BOTH GROUPS, THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS, GAVE NO THOUGHT TO THEIR TREATMENT OF "THE LEAST OF THESE" AND ARE SURPRISED TO DISCOVER THAT THEIR ACTIONS (OR LACK THEREOF) MATTER SIMPLY BECAUSE IT NEVER CROSSED THEIR MINDS THAT GOD WAS PRESENT.

BOTH GROUPS ARE SURPRISED BY THE JUDGEMENT OF THE SON OF MAN. BOTH GROUPS - THOSE PRAISED FOR CARING AND THOSE CONDEMNED FOR NOT CARING, RESPOND WITH THE SAME MEASURE OF CONFUSION... "LORD, WHEN DID WE...?"

BOTH GROUPS ARE SURPRISED BECAUSE NEITHER EXPECTED THE SON OF MAN WHO COMES IN GLORY TO BE PRESENT AND AVAILABLE TO THEM IN THE FACE OF "THE LEAST OF THESE".

BOTH GROUPS IMAGINED THAT THE SON OF MAN WOULD COME IN STRENGTH, POWER, MIGHT, AND GLORY, AND YET JESUS REVEALS TIME AND AGAIN THAT HE COMES TO US INSTEAD, IN WEAKNESS, VULNERABILITY, BROKENNESS, AND SHAME. IN OTHER WORDS, HE COMES TO US IN A WAY THAT IS ACCESSIBLE TO US, TO MEET US IN OUR NEED.

HERE'S A QUESTION FOR YA - IF THE KINGDOM WE ARE TO INHERIT AS BAPTIZED BELIEVERS - IS THE PLACE WHERE GOD'S WILL IS DONE AND WRONGS ARE MADE RIGHT, CAN I REFLECT THAT KINGDOM NOW IN THE WAY I THINK AND THE DECISIONS I MAKE? THY KINGDOM COME - ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN - IS **THAT** WHAT WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY THOSE WORDS??????

WE MIGHT FEEL OVERWHELMED BY THE ISSUES FACING OUR NATION AND OUR WORLD, AND SINCE MOST OF US DON'T HOLD HIGH POWERS OF AUTHORITY IN GOVERNING BODIES, WE MIGHT EVEN FEEL POWERLESS TO CHANGE THESE REALITIES.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE PERSON RIGHT IN FRONT OF US WHO NEEDS OUR HELP? EVEN IN THE MIDST OF HIS OWN PERSONAL AGONY ON THE CROSS, JESUS REACHED OUT TO A CONDEMNED THIEF BECAUSE HE SAW HANGING NEXT TO HIM A FELLOW HUMAN BEING IN NEED.

JESUS SAW THE WORLD AS A BODY, WHERE EACH PART IS IMPORTANT, AND ALL THE MEMBERS NEED EACH OTHER.

BUT BECAUSE OF SIN, OUR WORLD FUNCTIONS MORE LIKE A HIERARCHY, WHERE EVERYBODY IS IN COMPETITION, AND ONLY THE STRONG MAKE IT TO THE TOP. THOSE WHO DON'T MAKE IT FEEL LIKE FAILURES.

AT THE TOP THERE IS SUCCESS, POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND PRESTIGE. THAT'S WHAT EVERYONE IS STRIVING FOR.

JESUS CAME TO CHANGE ALL THAT - TO CREATE A BODY WHERE FORGIVENESS AND ACCEPTANCE REPLACE RIVALRY AND REVENGE - WHERE EACH HAS A PLACE AND ALL WORK TOGETHER.

IN THE BODY OF CHRIST, SOMETIMES YOU'RE THE ONE IN NEED, AND SOMETIMES YOU'RE THE ONE GIVING THE HELP. IT'S ALL BASED ON LOVE - A GENUINE LOVE THAT MEANS YOU WON'T ABANDON ME WHEN YOU SEE MY WOUND, BUT YOU WON'T JUST FLATTER ME WHEN YOU SEE WHAT YOU CAN GAIN FROM ME EITHER. TO BE THE BODY OF CHRIST IS TO ACCEPT IN EACH OTHER ALL THAT IS GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL, BUT ALL THAT IS FRAGILE AND BROKEN TOO.

JUST AS YOU DID IT TO THE LEAST OF THESE WHO ARE MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY, YOU DID IT TO ME.

THE WORK OF THE DEVIL IS TO DIVIDE AND TO CONDEMN. BUT THE MYSTERY OF JESUS IS TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER. WHEN THE CHURCH FUNCTIONS AS A BODY AND NOT A HIERARCHY, WE CAN LET DOWN BARRIERS. WE DON'T HAVE TO PROVE OURSELVES, OR PRETEND TO BE BETTER THAN WE REALLY ARE. NOW THERE'S A WORD OF HOPE.

IN THE BODY, OUR CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER BECOMES A SIGN OF GOD'S PRESENCE TO ONE ANOTHER AND TO THE WORLD. THAT I LOVE YOU, NOT BECAUSE I EXPECT SOMETHING FROM YOU, AND YOU LOVE ME, NOT BECAUSE YOU EXPECT SOMETHING IN RETURN, BUT BECAUSE WE BELONG TO THE SAME HUMANITY, THE SAME LORD - NOW THAT'S A WORD OF COMFORT.

WHEN WE WELCOME SOMEONE INTO THE BODY THROUGH THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM. IN DOING SO, WE CONTINUE TO PROCLAIM THE WORD OF HOPE AND COMFORT. WE CONTINUE TO PASS ON THE INHERITANCE, WHICH WAS PASSED ON TO US. SO THAT WE MAY BE READY FOR LIFE IN GOD'S KINGDOM WHEN HE COMES AGAIN IN GLORY! IN THE NAME OF JESUS. AMEN.