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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Christ the King

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and Brothers, as I noted in the announcements, today is Christ the King Sunday.

Today is the final Sunday of the Church year.

Next Sunday marks the beginning of Advent and the beginning of a new Church year.

And so the year 2020 on the church calendar concludes today.

And as is the case on Christ the King each year, our lessons lend themselves, such that we get a glimpse of the culmination of time on this day.

Christ the King Sunday is that time of year when we get of preview of the end time.

Today is the day when the Church looks with expectation and longing towards Christ's coming as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Thus, our gospel lesson from Matthew, chapter 25, alludes to that day, in the words, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory..."

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory..."

On that day, all the angels will accompany him.

And on that day when he comes again, the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory.

And all the nations will be gathered before him, and the great sifting of the sheep and goats will take place, the great sifting of the blessed and the accursed.

Yes, today, we are looking through time to that future day of God's eternal reign.

PAUSE

But, this text about Jesus coming, sisters and brothers, is as much about today, as it is about the future.

This text is as much about all the days leading up to Christ's coming, as it is about Christ's coming.

Indeed, this text is not just a future vision, but it is also a present vision.

This text is about the here and the now.

This text tells us how we are to live our lives today in expectation of the coming of the Son of Man.

Yes, this text is as much about the other notable somebodies of today, as it is about the notable somebody Jesus Christ, who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Yes, to be sure, this text is about the VIPs in our present time.

It is about the VERY IMPORTANT PERSONS in our world today.

PAUSE

Now, our world elevates certain persons above others.

Our world holds certain persons in very high regard.

Our human society esteems certain persons, such that they are paid great homage.

Yes, our human race lifts up certain persons.

We talk of certain persons as celebrities.

We describe certain people as famous, as influential, and as important.

We call certain persons royalty, legendary, or renowned.

Some individuals are labelled National Treasures.

Some are deemed Household Names.

But none of the people in our gospel reading today...

None of the people in our gospel fit that bill.

No, the distinguished persons in our gospel reading are not persons of great repute.

No, the distinguished persons in our gospel reading are not illustrious personages.

No, the distinguished persons in our gospel reading are who?

The hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner.

These are the VIPs in God's eyes.

There are the celebrities in God's eyes.

And we could most certainly add others to this list.

The distinguished persons in God's eyes might also include the ill-treated, and the overlooked, the disenfranchised, and the ostracized, the homebound, and the destitute, the unemployed, and the underemployed, the lonely, and the despairing, the grieving, and the heartbroken, the disillusioned, and the cynical, the scorned, and the unloved, the dying, and the suicidal, the addict, and the oppressed, and so on, and so on, and so on.

Anyone and everyone who for whatever reason is living a life that is less than the promise of a full life...

It is to those persons, to whom Jesus gives a nod in our gospel reading.

The hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner...

All these persons have had the promise of a full life pulled out from under them.

Just like the persons we hear about on the news each and every day, whether we are talking about persons who have been quarantined, or hospitalized, or made jobless because of the virus.

Or whether we are talking about persons who have to be extra careful about how they conduct themselves while driving, or jogging, or even walking just because of the color of their skin.

Or whether we are talking about persons who have lost their possessions or loved ones due to the ravages of a forest fire or a devastating hurricane.

There are many persons, countless persons whose lives have been reduced, have been limited, because of the changes, chances and circumstances of life, and they, too, are included on the list in our gospel lesson.

These are the notables.

These are the VIPs.

These are the somebodies in the world today in God's eyes.

These are the ones whom we are to acknowledge, because by acknowledging them, by serving them, we are acknowledging and serving the most important one of all, Jesus Christ our Savior.

Did we take heed of that?

Jesus says, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did to me."

Let me reiterate Jesus's words here.

"Just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me."

Let me break it down.

Just as you served the person in need, cared for the person in need, responded to the person in need, so did you serve, care, and respond to Jesus himself.

PAUSE

Now, sisters and brothers in Christ, I need not remind us that Thanksgiving is fast upon us.

I need not remind us that coming up this Thursday, we will be celebrating Thanksgiving and this day is most often a day devoting to stuffing ourselves, right?

Thanksgiving is about stuffing ourselves full until we can't stuff ourselves anymore.

That seems to be the goal. That seems to be the protocol, right?

What are we supposed to do on Thanksgiving? Eat lots of turkey, stuffing, potatoes and gravy, corn, cranberry sauce, and apple pie.

That is the goal, and the saying is, "If you go away from the table hungry, it is your own fault."

So, yes, Thanksgiving is about eating, eating, and eating some more.

And oh, lest we forget, it is also about being thankful.

And thus, many Thanksgiving gatherings even include a time when those around the table share what it is they are thankful for.

So persons might say, "I am thankful for family. I am thankful for our country. I am thankful for my health. I am thankful for... you fill in the blank."

Each person goes around the table sharing what it is they are thankful for.

But as Thanksgiving gatherings engage in this little tradition, have you ever wondered what Jesus our Lord is thankful for?

Have you ever wondered if Jesus would just happen to show up at our dinner and he was made to answer the question as well, what it is he would say?

Can we just see it now?

Aunt Petunia just said she is thankful for her cat.

Uncle Harry said he is thankful for his reclining chair.

And then it is Jesus' turn.

And everyone pauses from eating to hear what it is Jesus will say.

The clanking of utensils on dinner plates ceases.

The ambient lighting suddenly dims, and a spotlight appears over Jesus.

And he looks around the table, and he says, "You know, I am thankful... that people recognize the hunger in others and are not indifferent to that hunger."

Jesus says, "I am thankful that people are not indifferent to the hunger they see in their neighbor."

PAUSE

This is after all the message of our gospel reading.

Jesus says we are to respond to the “hunger” in our neighbor.

Whether that hunger is for food and drink.

Whether that hunger is for hospitality or friendship.

Whether that hunger is for protection from the elements in the form of clothing.

Whether that hunger is for compassion and caring, for healing and wholeness.

Whatever that hunger might be, Jesus is thankful that we are not indifferent to the hunger we see in our neighbor.

PAUSE

It is a similar message all the way back in Genesis, chapter 3.

When Adam and Eve disobey God because of the serpent’s trickery, the serpent is cursed by God to go upon his belly and eat dust all the days of his life, and the serpent will never know hunger.

And Jewish rabbis have debated what kind of punishment is that, that the serpent would go upon his belly, eating dust, such that he would never know hunger.

And the rabbis said, “Ah, that is the punishment. To never recognize the hunger in the other person.”

So, as we are enjoying our feasting this Thursday, let us be reminded, that God calls us to recognize the hunger in others.

And again, hunger comes in many shapes and sizes.

Let us be reminded that God calls us to recognize the hunger in others.

And let us remember that Jesus is so very thankful when we are not indifferent to that hunger.

PAUSE

God desires that we respond to the hungry neighbor who comes to our knowledge.

It might be a phone call we receive. It might be an email or text that comes across our computer. It might be the face of an individual standing before us.

Are we able to see that person's hunger, or hear the hunger in their voice, or see it in their text or email?

And observing the hunger in our neighbor, are we able then to acknowledge that hunger, such that we respond with compassion?

PAUSE

Indifference, sisters and brothers in Christ...indifference is not an option, so this gospel lesson would suggest.

For indifference is to scoff at Jesus. Indifference is to turn a blind eye on Jesus. Indifference is to feel nothing for the Lord.

Indifference is to discount the presence of God in the neighbor.

Indifference is not to understand that the VIPs, the somebodies of this world are the very ones who are the least among us.

Indifference is not an option.

PAUSE

Yes, today is Christ is the King Sunday. But the glory and majesty of this festival day is only what it is because God in Jesus Christ recognized the hunger in all of us, and did something about it. God was not indifferent.

God recognized that hunger in creation and humanity for redemption.

God saw that hunger in us for redemption, and God responded with compassion, and God brought salvation in Jesus Christ, and satisfied our hunger. God is never indifferent toward us.

God is never indifferent toward us.

In the same way, Friends, by our gracious acts of compassion, we can save others, we can alleviate the hunger in others, and we can know something of what it is to be like Jesus, to experience his kind of majesty in showing compassion.

Christ the King Sunday helps us see what majesty, what being a somebody, what being a VIP is really all about.

Thank be to God. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God. Amen.