

Christ the King Sunday-11

Matthew 25:31-46

Today is the last Sunday after Pentecost, Christ the King Sunday and, under normal circumstances, could very well have been Stewardship Sunday and I am going to touch on stewardship. And we say good-bye to the Gospel according to Matthew—with a reading that probably makes a lot of people squirm, thinking, “Am I among the sheep or goats?” However that question is pondered does have something to do with stewardship and Christ the King.

While reading this week , I found a wonderful quote from Beatrice Bruteau. *We get the kind of world we ourselves create by our faith. The only way to change the kind of world we experience is to change the kind of creative consciousness we have, the kind of faith we have. It is our faith that creates the world.*

*We get the kind of world we ourselves create by our faith.* We also get the kind of church we ourselves create by our faith. What is offered to you as members and what is offered to those outside our doors is all up to you. What you offer to your church and faith community is also up to you. And it really does get down to faith, which is our action in responding to God’s grace in our lives.

I worked all through college, which helped to keep my student debt to a minimum. One of my jobs was waitressing at the old Oakwood Restaurant. I remember working one New Year's Eve. The owners decided to try something new, they set up tables in the banquet hall and offered a special dinner along with live entertainment. We served their meals, and when they had finished eating, the waitresses turned from food servers to drink servers--for the rest of the evening and into the next morning. Usually when people go out for the evening, they leave a tip when they leave. And we know waitresses rely on tips for most of their income. By the time our customers left, they had spent whatever they would have left their waitresses. We know a usual tip is 10-20% after a meal and should be more if that waitress spent the rest of the night running drinks, but we got almost nothing that night. Tips always come last and they come out of whatever is leftover.

Do we ever express our faith, our actions in responding to God's grace, in ways similar to those customers on New Year's Eve long ago? Do we give our time, talents, and treasure to God out of our leftovers, or do we give to God first?

Once I was out of college and working my new job as an elementary teacher, I realized I had more money when I waitressed. I remember having a conversation with Joe Leean, who owned Ding's Dock at the time. Joe was and is one of those faithful Christians who was always willing to talk about faith and God with anyone who wanted to talk. I was

complaining that I couldn't get my head above water financially and how could I possibly give anything to the church. He told me to give to God first. He told me when I write the checks for my bills, write my check to the church first and I will have enough for the rest.

Now that I have pledged to a church again, the first check I write, I will give to God first. Giving to God first is a spiritual practice and it is an action of faith. We know that giving to the church and to our other charitable organizations is not about donating money from what is left over, it is an expression of our faith.

In today's gospel, Jesus is also talking about giving to God first through actions toward others. After all, *we get the kind of world we ourselves create by our faith*. How do we respond to the needs of others, individually and corporately? Do we give and respond to others out of our leftovers, or do they come first?

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.' The encouragement Jesus gives his disciples to "practice heaven" and the way Matthew weaves in the end times should make us all rethink how we spend our money, how we spend our leisure time and how we give back to God in love and gratitude for what God has given us. And one of those gifts we have received is God-given dignity and value.

We have received that and every other person out there has received that.

One of my favorite "I want you to think about this books" is a book of reflections written by former Presiding Bishop Edmund Browning. I want to share with you Bishop Edmund Browning's reflection on sheep and goats and God's judgment of them.

You often see pictures of Jesus with sheep—carrying the lost sheep on his shoulders, separating the sheep from the goats at the Last Judgment. The sheep are always fluffy and white—nice, fat, contented sheep with mild faces. Maybe not too bright, but certainly innocent. The goats are easy to spot—skinny and brown, with a sly, conniving look about them. It's a cinch to separate the sheep from the goats.

But a friend of mine was visiting a Caribbean island. A friend who lived on the island asked if she had seen any sheep yet.

"No", she said. Her host smiled, "Do you know the difference between a sheep and a goat?" he asked her.

"Well sure," she said in surprise. "Sheep are fluffy and white, and goats are skinny and brown." Then her host told her that on that island, sheep aren't fluffy and white. They're skinny and brown, just like the goats. It's not easy to tell them apart when they're together in a flock.

We think we know the judgment of God, but we do not. You think you know the difference between the sheep and a goat, but sometimes you don't. So be careful when you make a moral judgment about someone else, or even about yourself. Sometimes a sheep and a goat can look a lot alike.

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