

This Sunday is “**Christ the King**” Sunday or the “**Reign of Christ**”. It is the final Sunday of the liturgical year. Next Sunday we will begin a new church year with Advent and prepare our hearts for the child Jesus born on Christmas Day. We have church seasons to help us move through the story of God’s saving grace and to help us re-remember the coming of God into the world as a child, the teaching of Jesus and the prophets, and the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Liturgy we say “we await the day of his coming” meaning Christ in Glory—a time when we understand that there will also be a judgement.



Christ in Judgment, Florence, 1300

In Matthew this Sunday we hear the Gospel lesson of a king who sits upon a throne and welcomes the people into the kingdom—or the reign of God. Like a shepherd separating sheep and goats-- not all will be welcomed into the abundance of the reign of God. Our temptation is to ask who is in and who is out. This is not the question Matthew is asking. Matthew challenges our expectations; as in other parables of Matthew, the people themselves do not know who are good and who are bad—who will inherit and who will not. As in the parable of the wheat and the tares, everyone has grown together and it is a long time before the good the bad are separated.

The key words of “When was it that we saw you?” is actually a question of “how have you served God’s people?” The king responds to the people who do not know when they saw him that it was when offered a cup of water, or visited the sick, or welcomed the stranger.

“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.”

Suddenly this image of the Son of Man is turned upside down in the Gospel of Matthew because the next part of the narrative in the scripture is the plot to kill Jesus. Matthew is moving us toward the Passion narrative and the Resurrection. The “king” is not who we think-He is the one who is “crucified, dies, is risen, and will come again”. This is the story we will retell in Lent.

Today we anticipate with images of the shepherd and images of glory the coming of Christ. We do not know when. We are reminded that this “king” judges by how we treat our neighbor and the stranger. We ourselves cannot know how our small acts of kindness change the world. As the story unfolds, it will be a life where we serve and care for one another—following Jesus in the midst of conflict, betrayal and great love.



Pastor Susan