

Christ the King / Stir up Sunday

Preached by Murray Wills
26 November 2017

8am St James'; 10am St James'

Matthew 25:31-46

May the word of God be spoken and heard. Amen

Today we celebrate the feast day of Christ the King. It is the last Sunday before Advent and next week we start the new church year. Our gospel reading for today comes late in Matthew's gospel and just before the Passion of Christ, and in our reading Jesus is seen as a King on his throne, separating the sheep from the goats, rewarding his subjects according to how well they have adhered to his teaching and example.

Not surprisingly, this Sunday is also known by some as Stir Up Sunday.

It gets its name from the beginning of the collect for the day in the English Book of Common Prayer, which begins with the words, "Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people".

If you look it up online you will also see that this day has also become associated with the custom of making of Christmas puddings, but that is not helpful in getting the message of the day across.

Why is it that we pray that God would stir up our wills to good works?

Well, how we live matters to God and as we see from the gospel reading today, Jesus separates the sheep and the goats, and he will come again in glory to judge them based on faith and actions.

Jesus tells this story to warn people that what they do matters to God and will affect our destiny. God will reward us according to our adherence to teaching in the scriptures. We must not assume that we can serve ourselves and serve God at the same time.

Just being Christian is not enough. Nor is just coming to church once every week or two without living our lives in service. In our passage today, it is abundantly clear that what God, wants is for us as one example is to care for those in need. God wants us to take Action.

We might be saved by God's grace through faith in Christ, and that is important, but it is our actions done in love that show whether we really are faithful to Jesus and his words to us.

Jesus' earthly ministry was one of love and compassion and mercy. His example was exemplified in healing people, in accepting them, in contrast to a society that is so easily alienating.

Jesus illustrated the nature of this kingdom through parables. His teaching illustrated the 'here and now' aspect of the kingdom – exhorting people to change their ways and believe the good news he was bringing – that news of unconditional love, and caring for the last, the lost, and the least.

As believers seeking to follow the way of Christ, we are subjects under his kingship. We are part of the kingdom of grace, of God's love reaching out to us, and through us to others.

Our culture rewards us when we worship all that is Not of God. But this conflict between the two Kingdoms, one of this world, one of the divine realm, becomes clearly delineated in the life of Christ. Jesus tells us and shows us that the usual things people elevate as gods, power, wealth, celebrity and fame are subsumed in the Kingdom of God by the supreme values of service, love, self-sacrifice, and faithful community.

God's Kingdom is not about what you have or who you are, it's about what you do. It's not about what the world values, but what God values.

Sometimes we need to take stock of how we are each doing in terms of carrying out the Great Commission, which comes at the end of this Gospel.

How are you living this out right now in word and action?

One helpful way to proceed, apart from what we are asked to do in the scriptures, is to assess what God is asking you to do on a regular basis. To look out for those Kairos, or God moments.

[SLIDE]

These can come in the midst of worship, while listening to a sermon, in our prayers, on a walk, or when you least expect it. Notice these thoughts or observations, or situations that God may present before you and ask.

What is God asking me to do?

What am I going to do about it?

This is something that Amanda and I and those in our 3DM or three-dimensional ministry group are practicing on a daily basis. If you would like some tips on how to practice doing this come and see me later.

And so to Baptism

What a joy it is today to have two Baptisms at St James' – Andrew Lawson and Charlotte Ashe.

I welcome them, and their family and friends.

In baptism we become full members of the Lord's family and the whole body of Christ. We become truly royal people.

In the baptism liturgy we use today we declare that

"God is love, God gives us life.

We love because God first loves us.

In baptism God declares that love;

in Christ God calls us to respond"

And we promise to nurture and teach and be a witness to those being baptised of how to live out our lives as members of the kingdom.

[SLIDE]

We as the community of faith pray:

"God of love,

we thank you for our calling

to be disciples of Christ.

Help us to nurture this child

in the faith we share.

May he/she grow to love,

worship and serve you,

and bring life to the world. Amen."

It is our great privilege to welcome Andrew and Charlotte to Christ's Church today, to start a new life in which they are accepted and sealed by God with the Holy Spirit to represent Christ to the world.

Baptism is, of course, a sacrament. And like all sacraments, it involves a gift of grace from God. Now what is so exciting and fascinating about all sacraments, and especially Baptism, is that the gift of grace from God does not happen all at once. It unfolds.

To be specific, we believe that there is grace given at the moment of Baptism. We believe that God really is moving and active. When the water is poured. When we invite God in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. When we make the mark on the newly baptised persons forehead, there is grace in the moment of Baptism.

And, there is also grace in what happens next. That is to say in what happens tomorrow, and the next day... and in the days and weeks and months and years to come. As the people around the newly baptised person begin to teach, and to nurture, and to model, and to help that person grow into the Christian faith, to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Christ the King is in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

But you and I are here among his people.

Today's feast of Christ the King, and our baptism liturgy challenges us all to live out our royal responsibilities and duties as completely as we can; and the Kingdom of God is not only about caring for those within it. It is about loving and seeking out those who are outside it.

A passage in Ezekiel talks of God as a good shepherd searching out sheep from all the places they have been scattered. Seeking the lost, binding up those who are injured, and strengthening the weak. This is part of our role too. The good thing is that we do not have to do it alone – we have each other, and most of all we have God with us.

With God at our side walking along with us, great things can happen.

Amen