

Sermon – Christ the King Sunday
Matthew 25:31-46
November 26, 2017

“Jesus...Is that Really You?”!

The king of an African village, after many years, faced the fact that his throne was wearing out. Yet he hated to part with his old one. So after his new one was built, for sentimental reasons, the old one was hoisted on ropes to the ceiling of his grass hut and stowed there. Then one night during a terrible wind storm the throne fell down and hit the king on the head, which leads to the moral of this story - people who live in grass houses shouldn't stow thrones.

We talk about kings and kingdoms today. Grace to you and peace.....

On a Christ the King Sunday years ago the great 20th century preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick told his congregation the story of the martyrdom of an early Christian leader named Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna – a city on the western edge of modern day Turkey. Polycarp was put to death in the year 156 AD as a warning to the Christian community in that city by its Roman Governor - a man with the lofty name *Staius Quadratus*. The Christian who wrote the record of Polycarp's death for us to remember boiled down a great truth into a few words when he wrote "*Staius Quadratus, Governor –156AD...Jesus Christ, King forever.*" Pastor Fosdick wondered if that person, whoever it was, could have guessed that in the 20th century we should be reading these powerful words. And one wonders if they knew just how on the mark he or she was in professing the truth of our lesson today from Matthew. *Staius Quadratus, Governor* did as he wished "*to one of the least of these of Christ*" and until a few minutes ago how many of you had ever heard of him? Jesus Christ, who lived in Polycarp by faith remains "*King Forever*".

This story from the history of the church implies a sort of "triumphant Christianity" – Jesus getting the best of everyday rulers. Yet our lesson from Matthew, in which Jesus clearly identifies himself as the king of heaven suggests otherwise. In this third of Matthew 25's parables Jesus extends their theme of "*the last day*" by saying he will come in glory as King and judge the people of earth, including one assumes the "*Staius Quadratus's*" of this world. But our Lord will do such judging solely on the basis of whether people recognized him when he resided among them as a hungry, thirsty, sick, lonely, imprisoned stranger.

20th century American journalist Ernest Poole – himself a bit of a skeptic with regard to the Christian faith, nevertheless recalled the simple elegance of his mother's Christian witness, of her saying: "*Though a strong church woman, I heard little from her...of judgement and hell. But I heard much of heaven, and more still of a heaven on earth. 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven my mother often prayed.'* I can never forget how she spoke those words as I knelt and repeated them after her - not so much in the tone of a prayer to a higher being, as in one of quiet resolve to herself. To do her share, through church and hospitals and charity work and the bringing up of her children, her share in the establishment of a heaven upon earth, this was her faith and her religion." There are a lot of ways of saying "*Jesus Christ, King Forever.*"

Jesus, in Luke 21, watched a poor widow put two copper coins in the temple treasury and said her offering exceeded that of those who put in handfuls at a time. In Matthew 18 he took forgiveness to the 70th power by saying that it must be granted “70 x 7” to a fellow believer, even though the official Jewish textbook on that subject said the answer was “3 times” and his disciple Peter wanted to suggest a new math that said as much as “7 times”. And in Mark 4 Jesus said the kingdom of heaven was successful even though 3 out of 4 of its “seeds planted” failed to produce anything simply because in those it did take root in the yield could approach 100 times what was planted. The arithmetic of the Kingdom of God is at times quite odd.

And the math gets even stranger in our story today from Matthew. The English author C.S. Lewis said that after this parable, any Christian census taking of the world can not assert that there are billions of people on this planet. Rather there are only two; “*there is me*”, Lewis said... “*and the only other person is Jesus...King Forever....in most distressing disguises*”. The parables of Matthew 25 teach us to live *expectantly*, live *usefully*, and most important of all, live *compassionately*.

Next week we begin the season of Advent. “*Prepare for the King...the King is coming*” is its main message. And while we will try to take our time we all know we can’t wait to get to Christmas. “*Where is he who was born King of the Jews?*” Those are words from Matthew’s gospel, chapter 1, a question that unbeknownst to the earthly kings who asked it finds its answer in our lesson today in chapter 25. Now we know the answer to that question those “Wise Men” posed, don’t we? Where is he...in Bethlehem? Where? “*I was hungry and you gave me food...I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...I was a stranger and you welcomed me...I was naked and you gave me clothing....I was sick and you took care of me....I was a stranger and you welcomed me*”. Oh, there you are Lord.

Jesus Christ...King Forever. When you see him, you worship him in a most unusual way.
AMEN