

Order of Service for November 22, 2020 - Reign of Christ

GATHERING

Gathering Song - 634, All Hail the Pow'r of Jesus' Name (verses 1,2,5,6)

All hail the pow'r of Jesus' name! Let angels prostrate fall;
bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all.
Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all.

O seed of Israel's chosen race now ransomed from the fall,
hail him who saves you by his grace and crown him Lord of all.
Hail him who saves you by his grace and crown him Lord of all.

Let ev'ry kindred, ev'ry tribe on this terrestrial ball
to him all majesty ascribe and crown him Lord of all.
To him all majesty ascribe and crown him Lord of all.

Oh, that with yonder sacred throng we at his feet may fall!
We'll join the everlasting song and crown him Lord of all.
We'll join the everlasting song and crown him Lord of all.

(Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)

Prayer of the Day

P - Let us pray.

O God of power and might, your Son shows us the way of service, and in him we inherit the riches of your grace. Give us the wisdom to know what is right and the strength to serve the world you have made, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C - Amen.

WORD

Gospel Reading Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for 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 in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' 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.'

“Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me

no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Sermon

This reading from Matthew is a parable which pretends that the end of the world has arrived. The only future left now is a heavenly one. The only thing the earth has left is history, is the past.

Matthew does this to try to get us to think differently about our present situation, our present actions. Because we all know that we think differently about things which are in our past, than we did when we were in the middle of them.

Think about how you felt 5 minutes before you started school for the first time. Or 5 minutes before you went on your first date. Or 5 minutes before you marched into the church for your wedding. Or 5 minutes before you went in for that operation. Remember the butterflies? The adrenaline? The nervousness? You probably weren't even "*thinking*" a whole lot right then; you were probably too busy just "*feeling!*"

But how do you feel about those things now, in hindsight? What do you *think* about them, now that there is a little water under the bridge? Or maybe a *lot* of water!

There's nothing wrong with thinking differently about these things now that they are past! That's perfectly fine, and perfectly understandable.

But it *is* different.

And it is that *difference* that Matthew wants us to be aware of. He wants us to pretend that we have a historical perspective on our lives. He wants us to pretend that we can look back on the whole thing.

Being a history nut, I can't help but wonder what we will think of this time of the world's life. What will be *call* it? The Post-Modern Era? The Second Dark Ages? Or maybe we'll look back and say we didn't realize it, but we were on the cusp of a second Renaissance! I don't know.

I also can't help but wonder what we will think about what we were *thinking* at the time. We look back, now, at the 1700s, and wonder, "How in the world could those people think that slavery was a good thing?"

And we don't have to go that far back. Just 50 or 60 years ago, we were thinking that the way we were running Residential Schools in Canada was a good thing. We had to take those kids out of their culture, right? Because everybody "knew" that our culture was better, right?

So. What are we thinking *today*? What will we look back on in 20 or 50 or 500 years and ask, "What were we *thinking*???"

There are probably a whole lot of answers to that question! And that's fine.

I would like to suggest one answer, one thing to consider. It's not a new thing. It's not something I just invented; I'm not that smart!

But I want to suggest one way that we think, that we would probably be better off if we could get rid of it.

The traditional name for this kind of thinking is “Dualism.”

Dual, of course, means two. So Dualism pretends that there are only two ways of looking at anything. It’s either this, or that; those are the only options. Something is either right or it’s wrong. It’s either yes or no. You’re either for us or against us. You’re either in or you’re out. There’s no neutral ground; you have to pick a side.

As I said, Dualism is not new. But it seems to be all the rage these days. In politics, dualism sounds like, “You either vote for this party or you want to destroy the country.” We see dualistic thinking in religious circles all the time. “My religion is right. So obviously, yours is wrong.”

Dualism is everywhere. “If you work hard you will succeed; if you are poor, you obviously haven’t worked hard.” “If you didn’t attend this school, you obviously can’t call yourself educated.” “Sure, you can drive anything; but the *discerning* driver will buy *this* kind of car.” You get the idea.

We can see the attraction for this kind of thinking. It’s easy. There are two options; you pick one and you’re done. End of discussion.

It’s comfortable. There’s a lot of security in knowing that you are right, and therefore everyone else must be wrong.

At least on the surface, it seems to simplify life. It reduces everything to in or out, yes or no. Can’t get much simpler than that!

And if we are approaching this parable from Matthew’s gospel in dualistic terms, *this too* will seem easy. “There are sheep; there are goats, and there is nothing in between except a really sharp picket fence. So make sure you’re in the sheep pen!” Easy peasy!

But we all know that life is much more complicated than that. Whether we are talking politics, or religion, or restaurants or what candy bar is your favourite, there’s *always* more going on than simply “Either/Or.”

Yes, I believe there are yes and no answers. But I also believe, and know from personal experience, that there are also such answers as “Maybe.” And “Possibly.” And even, “I don’t know.”

Yes, I believe there are such things as right and wrong. But I also believe, and know from personal experience, that there are also such things as partially right and partially wrong. There are such things as more helpful and less helpful, as more hurtful and less hurtful. It’s not as cut and dried as Dualism would have us believe.

Yes, I believe there are such things as black and white. But I also believe, and know from personal experience, that there are also such things as grey. And red. And green. And brown and purple and turquoise and pink.

If we settle for dualism, we might make our lives a little easier, at least on the surface. But we will not make our lives any richer. In fact, we will not be living the life we are called to live.

This is why I don’t think it’s helpful to read this parable from Matthew from a dualistic perspective, as easy as that might be. Because if we are honest with ourselves, we will come rather quickly to the realization that we are both sheep *and* goats. We live in *both* of these pens. And sometimes it’s pretty hard to tell where that picket fence is!

Yes, there are sheep. Yes, there are goats. But the point of this parable, *especially* if we can let go of our clinging to dualism, is not about making sure we are one, and making sure we avoid being the other. If there is one point to take from this parable, it's that *it is the ruler who does the separating*. It's not our job to do that. It's not our job to do that about ourselves, and it's not our job to do it about anyone else, either.

That's *part* of the good news of this parable. We are free from having to play that role. We are free from even playing that game.

The *other* part of the good news of this parable is that it *is*, in fact, another attempt to help us out of dualistic thinking. For us, as followers of Jesus, we need to temper our understanding of what it means to be a sovereign ruler with what we see and experience in Jesus. It's not either/or; it's not having a sovereign *or* having Jesus. It's looking at how Jesus *does* this ruling thing.

Jesus welcomed everyone. He talked with anyone. He spent his time with anyone. He healed lepers without demanding to know what they had done to deserve leprosy. He fed hungry people without insisting that they justify their hunger. He embraced poor people without telling them to pull themselves up and stop being poor. He ate meals with Pharisees. He went so far as to insist that a Roman soldier, an *occupier*, was an example of faithfulness far beyond anyone else that he had seen. He didn't even have harsh words for those who arrested him, or tried him, or judged him, or tortured him, or executed him.

The only ones Jesus ever had hard words for was those who insisted on drawing lines around others; those who pretended that they had the God-given ability to determine who was a sheep and who was a goat. In other words, those who insisted on clinging to Dualism. And even then, his harsh words were trying to free them from playing that game.

Sheep of God! Goats of God! No.

People of God. There is good news for *all* of us today! This parable is not about us. This parable is about letting God be God, and trusting that, in Jesus, we see how God intends to deal with *all* of us, no matter what this age ends up being called, no matter what car we drive, no matter what colour we dye our hair, no matter which candy bar is our favourite, no matter which pen we might happen to be in. Thanks be to God. Amen.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Hymn of the Day - 430, Rejoice, for Christ is King

Rejoice, for Christ is king! Your Lord and king adore;
rejoice, give thanks, and sing, and triumph evermore.

Refrain

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Our Saviour, Jesus reigns, the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our stains, he took his seat above. *Refrain*

His kingdom cannot fail; he rules o'er earth and heav'n;
the keys of death and hell are to our Jesus giv'n. *Refrain*

He sits at God's right hand till all his foes submit
and bow to his command and fall beneath his feet. *Refrain*
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Thank you for your continuing financial support of this congregation's ministry!

Prayers of the People

Longing for Christ's reign to be visible among us, we offer our prayers for the world, the church, and all in need.

[*Short pause*]

A - God of all, you set us free from the burden of either/or thinking. You set us free to welcome others as we have been welcomed. Thank you for this gift. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of all, continue to challenge the way we see things. Give us new eyes to look at all of life from the perspective of your final reign, where divisions will disappear, and separation will cease. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of all, we like to label, we like to categorize, we like to draw lines. Show us how we can let go of our games, and live in the promised reign of Jesus. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of all, guide your church in these difficult days. Release us from all that holds us back. Fire us with imagination and creativity. Help us respond to the gospel's call. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of all, we pray for those who are held in the grip of illness, of political power games, of economic injustice, of racial division, of broken relationships. Use your people, gathered here, to bring healing and hope to your world, especially those people and places we name before you.

[*Long pause*]

God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of all, in Christ we are free: free from either/or thinking; free to serve our neighbours and world. Fill us with the desire to follow. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.

P - And now we pray as Jesus continues to teach us:

C - Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we

forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

SENDING

Benediction

P - May almighty God,
The Father who created us to live in love,
The Son (†) who died and rose to bring us new life,
And the Spirit who brings God's reign even among us,
bless us all, now and forever.

C - Amen.

Sending Song - 855, Crown Him with Many Crowns (verses 1,3,4)

Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne;
hark, how the heav'nly anthem drowns all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless king through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of love – behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified.
No angels in the sky can fully bear that sight,
but downward bend their burning eyes at mysteries so bright.

Crown him the Lord of life, who triumphed o'er the grave
and rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save.
His glories now we sing, who died and rose on high,
who died, eternal life to bring, and lives that death may die.

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Dismissal

P - Go in peace. God's reign surrounds you.

C - Thanks be to God!

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