

St. Barnabas Sermon, November 22, 2020 - Christ the King

Matthew 25:31-46

As worshipers arrived on a late November morning at a church in a town in North Dakota, they encountered a rather disturbing sight. An apparently homeless beggar sat on the front steps, wearing tattered clothes, a wool cap pulled down over his eyes, wearing a pair of old, fingerless gloves and clutching a bottle.

Most of the arriving worshipers walked around this man or stepped over him as he sat there. Some muttered words of disapproval, and others suggested that he move someplace else before the children arrived for Sunday school. One member actually advised the man that the Salvation Army was a much more “appropriate” place for him to “sleep it off.” At one point a kind woman from the congregation brought the man a cup of coffee. However no one invited the man to come inside where it was warm and join them for worship.

Imagine, then, the congregation’s surprise during the processional hymn when their “homeless friend” made his way to the pulpit, and took off his cap - revealing that this “homeless man” was actually their pastor!

The pastor began his remarks that morning by telling them, “I didn’t do this to embarrass you or trick you. I did it to remind *all* of us that the one you encountered this morning is someone Jesus loves - and that he has called **us** to love him, too!”

Jesus’ lesson this morning begs the question of those of us who have chosen to follow him - How are we to respond to those around us who are in need? If we truly make that conscious decision to “live out” our faith, as genuine and sincere followers of our Lord - what will this look like for us, as you and I encounter the hungry, and the thirsty...the stranger, the naked, the sick...and those who are in prison?

Ken Cofiend, who with his wife Cathy, heads up **Save a Man Ministry**, and **House of Hope** - in a testimony he shared with us several years ago, told us about what a difference it made in his life - an **eternal** difference - because of those who cared enough to “visit **him** in prison.”

Is my tendency more to **pass by** those whose needs call out for attention? Am I so busy, or maybe so consumed with things in my **own** life that I'm often oblivious to opportunities to respond - which God places in my path? Do I tend to let the Enemy convince me that I, as one person, really can't make a difference - so why even try? Or do I try my best, by way of the Holy Spirit, to see others - no matter who they are and what their circumstances might be - through **God's** eyes...and then **respond** as **He** leads me?

Mother Theresa often said that she saw Christ in the face of each of the poor, the sick, and the dying to whom she ministered. And I can't help but believe that this was the perspective that made it possible for that *Saint of God* to "keep on keepin' on!"

You know, we sometimes think, or at least we're sometimes led to believe, that being a Christian is all about believing the "right stuff." Now, believing the "right stuff" is important, but so is how you and I choose to *live out* the faith we *profess*...in our relationship with *God*, and with *others* in this world.

James, the brother of Jesus, says in the epistle he wrote, chapter 2, verse 17, that "faith without works is dead!"..."Faith without works is dead!" He goes on to say in verse 18, "Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works, will show you my faith." We need to be **careful** as to how we **unpack** this, and how we relate it to other Scriptures - because we don't want to fall into the trap of believing that you and I can somehow **earn** our salvation - by doing enough "good works!" Amen?!

In Isaiah 64:6, the prophet makes it clear that "all of our righteous acts are like *filthy rags!*" All of those "good things" we do *on our own*, **outside** of our relationship with God in Christ, and separate and apart from the motivations and direction of the Holy Spirit - are **worthless!**

The **fruit** that is borne of one's faith should manifest itself in ways that go **beyond** that which is self-serving and self-focused. The fruit that I bear as a Christian should be that which is directed towards making a **positive difference** in the lives of those around me - *regardless* of who they are, where they come from, what they look like, or whether or not responding to

them and their needs causes me to move out of that “comfort zone” so many of us tend to want to live in **most**, if not **all** of the time! Amen!

Today, we celebrate the feast day of *Christ the King*. Those of us who have made the decision to follow Jesus have chosen to follow - not some martyr who died on a cross 2,000 years ago...Absolutely **not**!! We have chosen to follow the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords. We have chosen to follow the One who is the Alpha and the Omega - the Beginning and the End! We have chosen to follow the One who is the Savior and the Redeemer of the world! And a significant part of our decision to follow Him as our King, and as our Lord, involves our obedience!

And if I recall, the greatest commandments He gave us are to *love God*, and to *love our neighbor*. The interesting thing about it, as I've said before, is that these two commandments are *inseparable*! Because, you see, it's in loving our **neighbor** - no matter who he or she is - it's in loving our **neighbor** - that we show our love for **God**!

When I was in junior high, I read several books about a man by the name of Dr. Tom Dooley. Now, before I read these books, the only Tom Dooley I knew anything about was the one the Kingston Trio sang about in the folk song! But this real flesh and blood Tom Dooley was a Christian physician who spent much of his career as a medical missionary in places in this world where folks had little or no access to medical care. “I was sick, and you visited me.”

Not all of us can walk into a sick person's life with the medical skills of a Dr. Tom Dooley - but many of us can offer a “ministry of presence,” a listening ear, words of comfort, and a prayer.

After he gave his life to Christ, attorney Dale Recinella walked away from a lucrative practice as a successful attorney in order to minister to those on death row. God led him to do whatever it took and sacrifice whatever he must, to live out this calling - to “visit those in prison.” Ken Corfield, who I mentioned earlier, can **personally testify** to the **eternal** difference this made in **his** life!

And there are stories of countless others who have responded to God's call on their lives to start ministries like soup kitchens, and homeless shelters, and clothes closets. God called William Booth a number of years ago to begin an outreach ministry we know as the *Salvation Army*. We have a niece and her husband who are missionaries in Uganda - and whose lives are not nearly as comfortable as they might otherwise be - because of their commitment to ministry to young folks who are outcast and marginalized.

Not all of us are called to be Mother Therasas, or Tom Dooleys, or William Booths. But, I believe, based on God's words to us today - all of us *are* - in *some way*, called to reach out and minister to the **least**, the **last**, and the **lost**! "I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak..." (Ezekiel 34:16)

For those of us who are in a position to do so, this may involve some level of financial support of a mission or ministry. And that's a wonderful way to help make a difference to those in need! Many of us may sponsor a **child** somewhere in the world - and in doing so, make a difference in their life in such a way that they can receive an education, proper food, and medical care, and proper clothing - and through the message of the Gospel, the *assurance that God loves them!*

Sometimes, though, the **easiest** thing to do is to write a check. I believe there are times when God calls us to respond to needs He brings to our attention in a more "hands on" fashion. I'm thinking here of a team from St. Barnabas who went to Alabama, after the devastating tornadoes that went through there to respond to folks who needed home repairs, but who were poor, and who had no insurance.

And I'm reminded of so many others in our midst, who reach out and touch lives for Christ's sake in so many ways, both individually, to those whom they encounter and whose paths they cross - and those who respond to the needs of the least, the last and the lost through various outreach agencies and ministries.

Is there some way God is calling *you*, and is there some way God is calling *me* to live more fully into becoming a part of our Lord's story today - the story of those who minister unto Christ - by ministering unto the *least of*

those - who are members of His family? Am I willing to prayerfully consider those ways I can better respond to the least, the last, and the lost - as the Spirit touches my heart and leads me?

Christ is the King. God has put everything, and everyone, in subjection under *Him*. And the apostle Paul gives us a glimpse into the future in his first letter to the Church at Corinth, verse 24, when he says, "Then comes the end, when He (Jesus) delivers the kingdom to God the Father, after destroying every rule, and every authority and power." (1 Corinthians 15:24)

You and I serve and belong to the *King of kings*, and the *Lord of lords*. May we live, each and every day, more fully into reflecting His *love*, and His *image* to those around us...*including - the least, the last, and the lost!*
Amen!