

Christ the King Sunday (A) – Matthew 25:31-46

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Compassion*

Focus Question: *When in the previous week did someone extend compassion to you?*

word of life

“Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Matthew 25:40 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 25:31-46

This text is often referred to as the Last Judgment, describing the end of time when the Son of Man returns. Jesus uses the phrase “Son of Man” to describe himself sitting on the throne with all the angels at the time of judgment. All nations gather before him.

The age-old questions about the second coming of Christ – *when?* and “*what sign?*” – are answered in a surprising way: Christ comes now, in the “least.” The poor and the suffering are signs of Christ’s presence.

1. *How does Christ connect and identify with those in need?*

Jesus uses the image of a shepherd who divides the sheep from the goats. This would have been a commonly understood image. Sheep and goats mingle and graze together in the pastures during the day; but at night, or when the sheep are to be sheared or the goats milked, they are separated. The Great Shepherd is the shepherd for both the sheep and goats and knows them all.

Note that neither those identified in the parable as the sheep nor the goats knew who it was that they were serving (or not serving). They did not act (or fail to act) to earn Jesus’ favor or to gain their salvation. Rather, the faithful lived out their faith daily in the ordinary actions and service to others in need. They are called “blessed” – the word Jesus uses in the Beatitudes to describe the faithful disciple (Matthew 5:1-12). They have an *attitude* of a servant, reaching out and caring for those in need with the heart of Jesus. They fulfill what Jesus described earlier in Matthew as the great commandment: to love God and to love the neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). Followers of Jesus of every time and place are to act with the same attitude of servanthood and compassion.

This parable sheds light on the sins of omission – the things we are called to do that we fail to do. It is one thing to admit and confess our sins of commission, naming the wrongs we have done. We can often readily identify and name our sinful actions. But it is a more difficult task to name and identify those things we failed to do – those needs we did not even recognize. This passage shakes us to our core. The world is big; the needs are great.

2. *What are some sins of omission, those things left undone?*

The parable of the Last Judgment leads directly in Matthew’s Gospel into the account of the passion and death of Jesus. Just as Jesus has identified in the parable with the least and the suffering, so he enters into his own suffering and death.

3. *What role does compassion have in this passage?*
4. *What is the surprise in this passage?*

word among us

Small, seemingly insignificant and forgotten deeds done in everyday living are lifted up as service to Jesus himself. The sheep in the parable today were surprised – unaware of the good things they were doing. Their ministry had become a natural response to being a part of Christ’s family, a natural outflowing of life, an internalized faith and lifestyle – so much so that they were unaware of the good works they were doing as they shared God’s love.

Following Jesus means being an every-day disciple, not just one who shows up on Sundays. Instead, the challenge of being a disciple is to live with eyes open, seeing Christ in each person and extending the love of Christ to each.

1. *Identify ways you could live out this passage and “do” for Christ.*
2. *What attitude does Jesus want us to embrace as we encounter others with needs?*
3. *What does it feel like when someone extends compassion to you?*
4. *Is it easier to give than to receive acts of kindness? Why so?*

What needs do you see around you? Look closely, for you just might be surprised at whom you might meet in your neighbor, in the poor in your community, in the imprisoned, the lonely, and the hungry. It just might be the very face of Christ in your midst. Close your eyes and imagine driving home from your congregation. As you imagine driving by buildings, and people, try to identify people who might have special needs. The challenge of the disciple is to extend compassion today, tomorrow and then the next day.

5. *How might you get involved in helping others, especially the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and those imprisoned?*
6. *How might your congregation further help those in need?*

Yet compassion is not the only challenge for disciples. Each day we, as disciples of Jesus, struggle with forgiveness, grace, responsible living, courage, love, stewardship and other issues. Sin yanks at us to go our own way with no regard for anyone but ourselves. Thankfully, we have other Christians to encourage, support, and challenge us. We have God’s Word to ground us in the teachings of Jesus. We have the Spirit to nudge and prod us.

7. *How have the challenges of being a disciple of Jesus changed for you over the years?*
8. *Today, what is the greatest challenge for you as a disciple of Jesus?*
9. *What might help you face that challenge?*

Prayer

O Christ, continue to teach us to be your disciples. Forgive us when we seem slow to learn. Challenge us to grow in your Word.

Dig Deeper

1 John 4:7-12



Daily Discipleship

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last word

This week,
each day, name your greatest challenge
as a disciple of Christ.
Ask God to help you with that challenge.