

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 95:1-7a; Eph 1:15-23; Matt 25:31-46

Christ the King – Year A – Nov 26, 2017

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

Earlier in Matthew’s gospel Jesus had been doing his rabbi thing, teaching and answering questions of his disciples about the end of time. Expanding their thoughts he taught them with parables. Just before today’s gospel are the parables of the ten bridesmaids and of the greedy landowner, giving talents to his slaves and entrusting his property to them. As we celebrate Christ the King Sunday, we hear today the story of when Jesus comes in his glory, pointing to his titles of Son of Man and shepherd and king. Nations are gathered and people will be separated, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Where do we jump into today’s story?

In Palestine during Jesus’ time, shepherds would often have sheep and goats in their flocks. At night to keep the flock safe, shepherds would separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep could graze while the goats needed more protection. They were more vulnerable to the cold night air and needed a closer watch. The sheep could bring more money than goats and were preferred over the goats.<sup>1</sup>

Where do you find yourself in the story? I imagine that we are both sheep

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Stegman, SJ, in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A. Volume 4*, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 333.

and goats at various times in life. "...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matt 25:40). When was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food (or not) or thirsty and gave you something to drink (or not)? When was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you (or not), or naked and gave you clothing (or not)? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you (or not)? I think this passage calls us to look deeply within ourselves and wrestle with when we have looked into the face of "one of the least of these" and seen the face of Jesus. When have we looked into the face of the most vulnerable among us and seen the face of Jesus?

It reminds me of our baptismal vow to respect the dignity of every human being.

I wonder if our response to this notion of looking in the face of the most vulnerable among us, and seeing the face of Jesus, isn't directly connected to the place in our heart where gratitude resides. I believe we respond to the hungry and thirsty and the stranger and the naked and the sick and the imprisoned out of grateful hearts. We know and recognize and name and give thanks to God for all that we have and all that we are. Out of that place of gratitude we give ourselves—our time and our talent and our treasure.

Last week you heard Paul Atkins and Jerry Holmes and Mike Wallace profoundly offer their wisdom about giving. They each shared their own perspective and blessed us with their wisdom around why they give and why it's

important for each of us to ponder our giving. It's important for us to ponder the giving of ourselves all the time, for stewardship is not a once a year activity. It's year around call, and at this time it's particularly a call to consider your financial support to Trinity. If you weren't here last week to hear Paul and Jerry and Mike, talk to them today or talk to someone who might share what they gave to each of us.

You'll hear multiple ways of giving to the most vulnerable in our Canton community and in Hartford and in the wider world. *Quality Street Fair* has taken in over \$7,000 and will hopefully grow a little more today with final sales. That money gets evenly split between the *Canton Food Bank* and the *Canton Fuel Bank*. If you volunteer in the Food Bank or are around here on Tuesdays, you'll see the faces of people served and have an opportunity to see the face of Jesus in them. If you help with Miriam's Closet and have delivered clothes or helped someone find an outfit in the closet, you've had the opportunity to see the face of Jesus in them. If you volunteer for *Gifts for Canton*, you might have the opportunity to see the face of Jesus in the many who will gather in our Narthex on December 12, waiting to shop for their Christmas.

If you've brought or plan to bring warm socks for Hartford's homeless, you are reaching out to someone in whom the face of Jesus resides. You'll hear this morning that Camden Hegarty has taken on the coordination of Trinity's helping with personal care product packages for Hartford's upcoming Boot Party on

December 9. I believe you'll see the face of Jesus in Camden who wanted to reach out and help someone this Christmas. If you volunteer for that day, you will see Jesus in the face of those homeless clients being given care for their feet and new boots and new socks.

The ways we respond to the hungry and thirsty and the stranger and the naked and the sick and the imprisoned are tied to the gratitude in our hearts— hearts that have been strangely warmed by God's love.

All of this is about being on a journey to generosity—the journey to generosity about which Paul and Jerry and Mike spoke last week.

The Episcopal Network for Stewardship (TENS) has a number of great articles and one was written by the president of the TENS board of directors. She's also the retired Director of Philanthropy at Five Acres, a child-abuse prevention, treatment and education center in Altadena, California, and an active member of All Saints Church, Pasadena. She writes about why people give. She gives ten reasons for why she gives. I want to share just a few of those reasons. She says:

- It's a habit and how I was raised. From my earliest days, I remember folding little blue mite boxes for depositing my weekly offering every Lent.
- The Bible tells me so. From kindergarten I learned that the Bible teaches us to give back.

- I give to change the world. My parish is plugged in to where I can make the most difference in addressing the world's greatest needs. My parish stretches me.
- My parish is my community. I have made lifelong friends there.
- My parish is inclusive and not only with a capital "I." I was tenderly included when I was out of work, when I battled cancer, and when my husband died.
- I've been blessed and want to be a blessing to others. I am blessed to be able to continue to tithe my income in my retirement. My parish is a priority in my budget.

I invite you to think of the reasons why you give back to God and give to Trinity.

"...just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matt 25:40). You each can place yourselves in Jesus' teaching to be on the giving side. At some point in life you have most likely been on the receiving side—the side of being vulnerable and having seen the face of Jesus in your face. Being in that place of vulnerability and love beyond measure warms hearts and paves the way to a journey to generosity. Think about it. Pray about it. Remember that Trinity's in-gathering Sunday is next week. Remember the

African American saying that gets shouted out with vigor: God is good *all the time*. All the time *God is good!*