**Reign of Christ Sunday, Year A November 22, 2020**

**WELCOME**

**SCRIPTURE**

**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: “Gratitude”

This is, in many ways, the easiest sermon to preach: the message of Jesus down here with us…not up there (cross), but around here (sanctuary) and out those doors, and down the street… down any street, in any home or on any park bench…or over the phone, or in the driver’s seat at the stoplight in front of you…

There’s a message of judgment.

I think of my son…I’ve been telling my son for years this phrase: “how do you get freedoms? You show responsibility.”

And that’s the thing about the sheep and the goats. It’s not that the goats did wrong—no great offenses that they can be accused of… they just…didn’t do. They saw the stranger in need and ignored them. In other words: they were wrapped up in their own lives and other people really didn’t matter.

Now…doesn’t that sound like a teenager. Sitting in their rooms, quiet and crabby and eye-rolling or surly when asked to do something—Friends:

Are we the surly teenagers of our faith? Are we the Christian version of the surly teenager? Well? Do we show more love or more complaint?

Take it a bit further, what do we say to teenagers? *“Be thankful for what you have.”* “You have a roof over your head and meals on the table” (if you’re lucky).

Ok…Like the teenager do we focus on what we “want” and what we “don’t have” more than what is around us? *We can’t gather! We can’t do our spaghetti or our Halloween or our 5K race or our Bazaar or Rummage Sale or our fellowship or potluck. Mom…Dad…this stinks!*

Do we gripe about our chores? Do we gripe about our responsibilities? Let’s put it this way: we’re in a pandemic… we’ve lost over 250 thousand people in our country. We’re pushing 3,500 in Minnesota as I write this and it’s getting worse. What are our responsibilities in a time like this? Keep ourselves healthy? Yes. Keep our loved one’s healthy? Yep. Keep strangers healthy?

*What you did for the least of them, you did for me?*

(Heavy exhale. Grumble. Eye roll.)

What do I tell my son? You show my responsibility, you get freedom.

What does Jesus tell us? You are accountable for your actions. You are accountable for your *inactions*.

*TEENAGERS WITH A VOICE*

The primary spark that made me want to be a minister was witnessing teenagers at a Youth Group in Anoka, MN, find their voice. They were empowered to ask good questions. They were empowered to discover who they were.

And we all know that if you try to fit a teenager into a pre-conceived box, they will rebel, often doing the opposite!

I mean, if I wanted my son to be a mandolin player, I’d say: “see all these instruments? You can play any of them anytime you want! But don’t you DARE touch that mandolin!”

We let them find their voice. We let them find their passions. And we nurture them along the way.

And that’s our faith, friends. Find your voice. Find your passions. What is God calling you to do?

But do it like the mature individual that you are! I love the phrase “born again” but for heaven’s sake (literally) Grow up! You are accountable for your actions. You are also accountable for your inactions.

So…case study: With Covid, is the church shut down? The building? Yes. What about the ministry? Is the ministry shut down? Hope not.

It’s the teenage mind that says “we can’t do this and it stinks” it is the mature mind that says “ok, you’re giving me these barriers and restrictions, it’s time for me to get creative!”

What does Christian ministry look like without a building?

Here’s a hint: did Jesus center his ministry in a building? Should we?

There are those out there who would witness the curtain of the temple being torn on Good Friday and not be awed by the miracle and symbolism and understanding of the son of God, rather “well, darn it! Now we gotta fix that curtain!”

See what I mean? It’s bigger than the building. It’s your whole life.

So…mature questions for Christians to engage. Mature questions that Jesus pushes us to engage: How do we live our Christian lives and honor Jesus’s message here in the Gospel…remember: “when you did it for the least of these, you did it for me” – how do we do that in a time of isolation?

Here’s a starting point? The theme of today’s worship: Gratitude.

(FROM FRIDAY’S REMINDER)

Thanksgiving is a good reminder. No matter how crabby or grumbly we get, we really do have a lot to be thankful for. I know…I know… that last line is quite the cliché, but have you ever considered gratitude as a challenging discipline? See, searching one’s self for gratitude in a time like that is akin to lifting weights: it ain’t easy, it’s the last thing that you want to be doing, but when all is said and done, it will make you stronger. Seriously, try it. Next time you have a case of the craboodles, sit yourself down, shut yourself up, and make a list of things in your life that you are thankful for.

Like exercise, you may not see the results immediately, but I guarantee that with practice and perseverance (that’s why I call it a faith *discipline*) you’ll find yourself more adept at weathering the storm of negativity, and turning toward the love and kindness of the person that you want to be.

The person Jesus wants you to be.

Because He’s there, that amazing and powerful Messiah, in those small (and sometimes irksome) people reaching out a hand in need.

Here on Reign of Christ Sunday, the judgment from Jesus isn’t about “what we think about Jesus” rather about “what we do (or don’t do) in our daily lives.”

It is an interesting shift.

So yes, like those surly teenagers, we may be forced to sit in our rooms. Forced to take a “time out”… are we sitting there as surly teenagers? OR mature adults?

JOYS AND CONCERNS:

ORGAN on Monday at 5pm

Online giving. Plate Giving