

Pastor Kevin

Theme: Following Jesus

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

November 22nd, 2020

Following Jesus & Serving Others

Last week, we discussed preparing ourselves for the Advent season and the anticipation that comes with this Advent season. We reflected on 1 Thessalonians 5 as the community of Thessalonica prepared themselves for the return of Christ and came together in fellowship to celebrate the goodness in their lives. This week our focus shifts to Christ the King Sunday. Christ the King Sunday is not about us worshipping a king or leader, but it is about celebrating the servitude of Christ. Christ humbly gave his life for us on the cross and used his ministry to serve those around him through grace and love of all. Christ the King Sunday reminds us this is what it means to follow Jesus through serving others.

When I lived in Denver, every Thursday night, myself and several other college and grad students gathered with the campus minister at Denver University to make around seventy-five peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Each of these sandwiches were accompanied by a couple of cookies and a banana in a brown paper bag to be handed out with a bottle of water. On the next morning, we would gather at Civic Center Park next to the capital of Denver. We would meet with other volunteers who would bring more bagged lunches to serve and we would feed the homeless and hungry in the community.

There are two things I learned from serving this community for my three and a half years of living in Denver. The first lesson I learned was if given a choice to care about one another people, more often than not, care for one another. There were several times where we would run out of bagged lunches and not be able to feed everyone, but there were other times where we had extra lunches to hand out. Whenever we ran out or whenever we had extra, you always saw people gather around the gazebo and say, "Who didn't get enough? Do you wanna trade your banana for my cookies? I don't want my sandwich today, but do you want it?" I cannot count the amount of times where we would go around with extra bagged lunches and someone would take one only to give to another person that

extra lunch they had received. The wisdom I experienced is we love others by serving others.

The second lesson I learned is the work of the gospel is hardly done within the walls of the church. There is one time in particular that stood out to me at my time in the park. There was construction going on nearby for about two months during the spring, and because of this, we would have a few construction workers who would stand in line to receive the bagged lunches. This caused a rift between the homeless and the workers because the homeless would complain they had nothing so why would we give the construction workers lunches the homeless needed. After a few weeks of damage control and trying to make extra sandwiches, one of the construction workers approached us. He said, "Thank you, because you saved my life this month. My family and I are experiencing a really rough time financially. We can't afford to feed everyone, and our kids take priority. These bagged lunches were sometimes the only meal I received all day. Thank you so much!" The wisdom I gained from this experience was everyone suffers, and we do not know what others are truly going through, regardless of what we perceive from the outside.

In today's scripture reading, I am reminded of these lessons of the park that I shared with you today. In our weekly lectionary study, Pastor Brenda and I were talking about Jesus in the final chapters of Matthew. Jesus is a bit of a pessimist and cynical throughout these final chapters talking about the end days, gnashing of teeth, destruction and doomsday prophecies, and overall, he seems like he needs Peter to give him a Snickers candy bar and calm down. However, in the passage we read today, Jesus sums up what he has been trying to say all along. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is portrayed as the new Moses.

Well, in the simplest of terms, who was Moses? Moses was the purveyor of the law. Moses brought the law to the Israelites, so to Matthew, Jesus was the purveyor of the law bringing forth the law to the people. Jesus' law was not the law of the Sadducees who were concerned with prestige, power, and status. Jesus' law was not the law of the Pharisees who were concerned with the correct interpretation of the law, rules, and regulations. The law of Jesus was to love yourself to love your neighbor for this is how you will be judged at the end of your life.

Jesus uses an analogy of sheep and goats. The sheep are the ones who followed the teachings of Jesus and did God's work, lived into the Spirit's calling, and spent their lives serving others to help those in need, bring the outcasts to the center, and give back what had been given to

them. The goats are the stubborn individualists who went about it on their own terms, looked after only themselves, and put themselves far above others instead of humbly accepting their place in the mosaic of humanity. Their selfishness was their demise. Although I have known many sheep in my life, I have met just as many goats who seem to think they have all the answers because of their education, their power, their influence, or their status in their community. Sadly, we are led, more often than not, in society by goats whose own self-interests interfere with that of the people who cry out in need of help in many different ways. How do we follow Jesus?

Christ lays it out in fairly simple terms, “³⁴ Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. ³⁵ I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.” This verse is not about being perfect and always meeting the needs of those around, because there isn’t anyone here on earth that is capable of meeting the needs of everyone. This verse does remind us that as the body of Christ it is our calling and mission to take up our cross and serve together those around us to take care of one another.

This all sounds great and makes us feel better when we do these things, but how in the world do we do this during a global pandemic? I encourage you to take part in the small things. Donate some food to the local food bank, give a couple extra dollars to a charity you donate to, give a friend a call that you haven’t spoke to in some time to let them know you love and miss them, take up an angel tree family or child, but whatever you do, do it not to receive praise and accolades; do it to serve others through Christ Jesus your Lord and Savior. Christ has shown us the way and now we must follow the path laid out before us. It is not a glorious path filled with riches and amazing possessions like a king, but it is a path of servitude, love, grace, and compassion for our neighbors. This is the way of the Gospel and the message Jesus reminds us of as we approach his birth and the Christmas message of love.

Remember the words of our founder, John Wesley, Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.” May you be the gospel message to a world in desperate need of love and hope. May you spread the contagious love of Christ to all those around you today and for the days to come. Amen.