

## “When Did I See You? ”

Texts: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Ephesians 1:14-23 (Series A, Christ The King Sunday) Ps. 100

Matthew 25:31-46

Let us pray –

Creator and maker of us all - bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts - grow thou in us and show us your ways and inspire us to live by your truth. Amen.

The story is told that some years ago, an American soldier on a bus in Sweden told the man sitting next to him, 'America is the most democratic country in the world. Ordinary citizens may go to the White House to see the President and discuss things with him' "The man said, 'That's nothing.

In Sweden, the King and the people travel on the same bus.' "When the man got off the bus at the next stop, the American was told by other passengers that he had been sitting next to *King Gustav Adolf VI*.

How many times have you heard the parable of the sheep and the goats? Once? Twice? A dozen times? I think most of us, at least those of us who have been around the church for a while have heard it several times and are quite familiar with it.

This parable is certainly one of the key passages that underlies what modern theologians call "*The Social Gospel*" which formed the basis to much of the work of the ancient monastic movement, and "Missionaries of Charity" founded by the late Mother Theresa.

In fact the parable of the sheep and the goats is probably one of the most quoted parables in all of Christendom -right up there with the parable of the *Prodigal Son* and the *Parable of the Talents* which we heard last week.

This parable is probably the most difficult for modern people to accept, since some hold to the fact that a loving God would not hold people **accountable** for their **disbelieve** in God and evil deeds. But the Bible is very clear on this one. Things cannot continue to be the way it is, there is a day of accountability, judgement in the horizon.

When all nations *great* and *small* are gathered before the judge, before the throne of the Son of Man, before the King, and the king separates them - the right from the left, the sheep from the goats, and he judges them - and those on the right are saved, and those on the left are condemned.

Yes!! God is a God of mercy, grace, forgiveness and etc. God is also a God of *Truth* and *justice*, *saviour* and *judge* all wrapped up in one character. (***The Story of the young lawyer who saved a drowning boy***). The judgement is made on the basis of the compassion, the love, or the lack of it that is shown by those who gathered before the throne of judgement.

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you took me in" the son of man tells those on his right. To those on his left he says the exact opposite. "I was naked" he tells them, "and you did not give me clothing, I was sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

Powerful words isn't it? Words of great clarity. Words with a powerful message for those who have ears to hear it. Yet, in the end, despite our knowledge of the story and of its message - the message about the importance of our acts of sharing and caring, especially with those who are numbered among the least of us - the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, despite our knowledge of this parable there are elements to it that are not often talked about or if talked about which are ignored or glossed over.

The surprise expressed by the sheep and the goats when they hear the Son of Man say - "I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me drink." or "I was naked and you did not clothe me" and "I was in prison and you did not visit me" Why are they surprised? What is it that both the *sheep* and the *goats* seem to be missing when they perform their good works - or when they fail to?

Christ wasn't talking about how blessed are we when we visit our friends who are sick, or how wonderful it is when we give good things to our family members and our fellow believers, or how nice it was when we cloth the folk who are just like us.

No Jesus talks about the least among us - the least within this world, those whom conventional wisdom might even regard as doomed,

- the poor of Calcutta,
- the thirsty and hungry in Somalia,
- the sick in the wards and on the desert and jungle floors reserved for AIDS patients,

*Jesus talks and those who are in prison*

- perhaps sex offenders
- perhaps the prostitutes
- perhaps murderers
- perhaps only those who have stolen so that their families may eat. We don't know.

But we do know that they are the least amongst us. Those persons whom we might think don't count. Those people whose opinions we might regard as unimportant or invalid, because of their age - or their gender. Those people whose cries we might ignore because of their race or their economic position. And that the Son of Man, claims to be among them - indeed in them.

Bear with me a minute or two more as I talk about this. There is no question raised in this parable of what creed either the sheep or the goats had believed; or whether they had sworn allegiance to one whom the bible calls the Son of Man - the Good Shepherd – the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

There is only the surprise - who is - in fact -Christ Jesus himself - has been present in every person they had ever met, and most especially, in the *needy ones* and the *least important ones* - the ones that Jesus calls "*the least.*"

We sometimes think that religion is about believing stuff, and that if we believe the right stuff we are safe. But it not so. Rather our faith should be about awareness, about having our eyes opened to the real world, and responding compassionately to it. Whether or not we are "aware" that the Christ is there.

The parable is calling to us, however, to see the Christ there, to see "the Son of Man" in the restless child who is getting in our way, and to hear God in the voice of the beggars who so often come - waiting for a chance to get a free lunch.

The parable is alerting us to the importance of *compassion* and to the fact that the Son of Man is present in the needy of our world. To meet the least of the brothers and sisters of the Son of Man however we don't need to go to Calcutta, or the Somalia or Iraq, or slums of Brazil or to one of the overcrowded prisons in our land, do we?

There are many who are marginalized, many who are regarded of little significance of not being equal to those close to us right here amongst us - here in Montreal - perhaps even here in this church - or even in our own families? Remember the first and the greatest commandment - *the one about how we are to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and our neighbour as ourselves?*

John the Apostle writes: *1 John 4:20-21*: "Anyone who does not love his *brother, or sister* whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother *and sister*".

The sheep - those on the right - have shown love for their brothers and sisters, and in doing so they have shown love to God, and so they enter the kingdom prepared for them. Their faith is alive - even if they have not grasped the fullness of it. Even if they have not recognized how the Son of Man is everywhere about them.

Think of the fullness of it. If our eyes were opened to the depth of the real world and not the shallow world of conventional wisdom. How far should we go in our caring? Who should we care for - and who, if any, should we not care for?

How can we prioritize our caring so that the truly needy get what they need while those who would suck us dry do not. I can't answer these questions for you and you know that. It is something that each of us needs to struggle with, and reflect on a case by case, day by day basis as the Holy Spirit guides.

But I can tell you this morning that Christ is all around us. That Christ is in the least among us.

- ❖ In the single welfare mothers & fathers
- ❖ persons suffering with Covid-19 and other illnesses
- ❖ in the prisoners in our jails
- ❖ and in the homeless upon our streets.

Think about this one last time today with me. Think of it some 2000 years ago when the Son of Man - the one who is King of King and Lord of Lords, wandered as a poor preacher in a poor land, having no home to call his own, much less a throne of righteousness.

Think of when the Son of Man was tried for blasphemy and flogged 39 times as a common criminal and then was hung on a cross to die as one who was accursed. Think about how the Son of Man came among us - that first time - about the circumstances of his life and his death.

The prophet Isaiah, some 700 years before the birth of Christ puts it this way: *“He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised - and we held him of no account.”*

Where is Christ to be found today? He is most certainly here - in this holy place. Is in you my brothers, and sisters. But he is also here in ways we do not so easily grasp.

- ❖ I understand the surprise of those sheep on the right of the Son of Man - and of the goats on the left.
- ❖ I understand because it is so easy to not see Christ in those who are counted to be the least among us.
- ❖ an effect for those who receive our acts of kindness,
- ❖ and an effect for us who perform those acts.

I understand that seeing Christ in those around us is so enriching, so helpful - as we walk the walk that he calls us to walk. Because seeing Christ in everything is so transforming for us and for our world. May we all have eyes to see, and ears to hear. **Amen.**