

Christ the King Sunday. This is it - the last Sunday of the long string of Sundays after Pentecost that has taken us through summer and into the fall. Next Sunday is Advent, the beginning of the church year and the beginning of our preparation for Christmas. So this is it -the big moment. You might have noticed the theme of the end time is coming in our last couple of Sundays: “The bridegroom will return.”, “The master who gave talents to his servants comes back.”

In today’s gospel, Christ the King is already here. The Son of Man has come in his glory. The end time is here and everyone is gathered together. People of all nationalities stand in front of Christ the King and he divides them into two groups, one on either side of him. First Jesus turns to those at his right hand and says. God is very pleased with you. You are the people for whom God has been planning a new world since the beginning of time. You can join me there. I remember when I was starving, and you gave me a good meal; I remember when I was thirsty, and you brought me a drink; once when I was a social outcast, and you invited me home, then I had nothing to wear and you helped me out; when I was unwell you looked after me and when I was in prison, you visited me. These good people will say “Leader when did we ever give you a good meal or stand you a drink? When did we have you in our house or give you clothes? We don’t remember you being ill or visiting you in prison. Then the leader said believe me, when you did these things for people that most think are not worth the trouble, you did them for me. They are my family. Then Jesus turns to those on his left and says as for you lot, go. I cannot stand the sight of you. When I was starving and thirsty, you shrugged your shoulders, when I was an outcast you shunned me; you didn’t care about my worn out clothes or about my health and when I went to prison, you said it served me right.

These people will protest, Leader when was all this? The Lord will say - when you ignored those you thought didn’t matter, you were ignoring me. <Pause> Now when we hear this gospel, it is very tempting to try and figure out which group we are in. Are we going to be on the right or the left? Are we sheep or goats? Well the answer is yes and yes. We can’t tell which one we are. We are as clueless as the people in the gospel. So instead of trying to figure out what group we are in, which is God’s job; let us see what God wants us to hear.

This morning’s gospel is to remind us that we encounter Jesus in every person that we meet whether it is our best friend or the person huddled in the doorway from the cold. We are connected to Jesus through each other and through creation. Tracey Lind, my new favorite author, tells a story that is

told by Martin Bell that brought home our interconnectedness to the world around us. The story is about Thajir, a little boy who liked the sunshine the grass and the trees and especially the wind. One day the wind spoke to him and told him three basic truths of life and Thajir promised not to forget them. One of the truths was that everything that is, is good and at the center of things, life belongs to life. That evening when Thajir's mother read him a story about elephants and asked him what he recalled about the story. Thajir told his mother, "It was most important to remember that whatever hurt the elephants hurt him, and that whatever helped the elephants helped him. He added that at the center of things life belonged to life, and that this meant that he and the elephants shared the same experience and were somehow united with one another. He went on to say that it was good to be an elephant and it was good to be Thajir.

The interconnectedness of life. We like to pretend that it is not there and there is "us" and "them", and that what happens to the others out there does not affect us – at least not too much. The pain of the world is too much. It is overwhelming and we try to protect our lives, but what hurts the world hurts us and what helps the world helps us. As Jesus says - Even as you do it unto the least of my brothers you do it unto me. What we do to Christ we do to ourselves because we are all connected to Christ, to God to each other. Christ our King is among us – in a strange way to be sure as kings go - No purple robes. No crown. No legions of soldiers. No great processions and parades. No castle. No place to live. Rather he claims to be poor, and hungry, and a stranger, and in prison, and sick, and thirsty. He claims to have nowhere to lay his head. He says to us, his disciples, "See all these sisters and brothers of mine who are homeless like me? They are me. I am them. To serve me you must serve them. When I come back, I will see what you are doing and whom you serve. I am here with you now through them.

So the pain of the world is our pain. Jesus' pain is our pain. We don't reach out to those in trouble just because it is good to do and to get stars in our crown. We reach out to them because in them we encounter Jesus. In them and through Jesus, we are connected to each other and the world. We do a lot of reaching out to the poor at Epiphany. Many of you came to this church because of the work that this community does with the poor. Our doors are open during the week to provide shelter and a place to sit. We provide a hot breakfast on Sunday morning when most other places are closed. We hired an Urban Missioner so our community could better understand the needs of the people

downtown and be present with them. We also get involved personally. We get up early to serve The Welcome Table Breakfast and give our money to buy the food. The question I would like to ask you is whether we know the pain of the people we serve, the people who are part of us, because what affects them affects us.

This past week, I went to the first night of the revival at the National Cathedral – A Word to the City where the Rev James Forbes was the preacher. What has stayed with me from that night, is that when things are bad we need to cry out. It is only when we cry out that action is taken and things begin to change. Are we crying out about the problems of the downtown poor that we encounter? And I know there is a lot to cry out about but if we could start talking about one thing, change might start to happen. One of the problems I hear a lot about from our guests is the conditions at the Franklin School Shelter on 13th street. I have heard stories of overcrowding, too few toilets, people having their things stolen while they sleep, and people being worried about their safety. I have been hearing these stories since I came to Epiphany and yet I have listened and shook my head in sympathy. I thought “What can I do?” Shelters are hard places to be. But what if it was me? --- But it is me and you, because the people who are in the shelter are our neighbors and our friends. So I took a step and made a phone call and discovered that this is not how a shelter is supposed to be. The Franklin School building was never meant to be a shelter. There are other shelters in the city with much better facilities but it is there and until another place is found for the men who seek shelter there, it will remain as is. I asked the person at Catholic Charities who oversees the Franklin School shelter what we at Epiphany could do and he said it was an advocacy problem. The city has to find a different building. Advocacy – crying out – going up against the city and other powers - all that is not easy to do. Even if we do it, nothing may change but if we say nothing, if none of us do not cry out, then for sure nothing will happen. I have a voice. You have a voice. What is good for everyone living at Franklin School shelter is good for us. What hurts them hurts us.

There are all sorts of things that need to be cried out against –problems at other shelters, lack of affordable housing, no jobs for people who want to work, and abuse if the homeless on the street and that is just in this city. There much else to cry out about – our treatment of the environment, the epidemic of HIV and starvation all over the world. This is what our king, Jesus Christ calls us to. This

is the king who dwells with the poor and those who have nothing. So cry out – cry out for your brothers and sisters because we share the same life and we are united with one another in Christ.

When I come into the church on Sunday mornings, I greet people in the church, in the hallways and in the dining room. Sometimes I ask them how they are. I get various responses. Some say – not so good at all. Others say, “Terrible. Real bad” Some say, “Things could be better.” But quite a few people say – I’m blessed. This is not the answer I expect knowing most people here are going through the roughest time of their lives but I look into their face and I know that what they say is true. In our society, those who have the money and the nice clothes the fancy cars and the high paying jobs seem to have it all. They can buy anything they want, do anything they want and go anywhere they want but I wonder, If I was to walk through a room full of people who by the standards of our society have it good, how many of them would say they are blessed. God has a way of turning things upside down. Jesus is our king yet he is a very strange king at least by earthly Christ our King is among us – on a strange way to be sure as kings go - No purple robes. No crown. No legions of soldiers. No great processions and parades. No castle. No place to live – period. Rather he claims to be poor, and hungry, and a stranger, and in prison, and sick, and thirsty. He claims to have nowhere to lay his head. He says to us, his disciples, “See all these sisters and brothers of mine who are homeless like me? They are me. I am them. To serve me you must serve them. When I come back, I will see what you are doing and whom you serve. I am here with you now through them. Jesus is with those who are cast out by everybody else. In today’s gospel, we see Jesus, Son of God coming in all his glory with the angels. He gathers all he people and what does he say – he says that he dwells with the poor, and the hungry, the stranger, those in prison, and the sick. No one can believe it. What I love about this passage is how surprised everybody is. The righteous say 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?’ The accursed say the same thing ‘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?’ In this strange upside down world of Jesus Christ how do we know whether we are the rich or the poor, whether we are righteous or accursed. You may have only a few possessions and no house but you may posses the greatest riches in the world. You may know things that no money can ever buy. You may have felt the love of God holding you and carrying you through the worst of times. These are true riches. Jesus tells us to reach out to those in need. I invite you to do that by sharing your riches- your knowledge of the love of God. What is your story about the love of God? How has God saved your life? Why are you blessed? What do you know about the true riches of life that God gives us? ***** These are the stories of true riches and perhaps this morning’s gospel is to tell those who have the earthly riches that they must reach out to those who have nothing. But perhaps it is also to tell those who know the riches of heaven to share

with those who are poor when it comes to those heavenly riches. Christ calls all of us to reach out to those around us and they may be poor and outcast in ways that we may not expect in the upside-down world of Christ. So reach out to your neighbor, share with your neighbor your riches whether they are the riches of this world or the riches of the world to come so that when the end of time comes he will welcome you into his kingdom.