

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.”

“Come Visit With Me”

By nature we seem to be drawn to that which we consider glorious. When we witness something spectacular we become inspired, awed and humbled. Works of art, great literature and poetry are glorious to some. Music and dance to others. Perhaps physical ability, intellect, and nature can be glorious too? As Matthew tells it, Jesus shared an awe-inspiring vision as he taught his disciples on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem. This vision is no parable upon which a short pithy truth, principle or moral lesson can be pulled out of! His vision is a revelation pointing us to where the glory of God can be found. He points to something out of our sight and ability to grasp on our own. God must guide us to accept this vision.

“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....” Yes Jesus, go on! We are listening. The disciples must have been enraptured over the glory of this vision. Here, finally, was their assurance of a future glory day.

Today is Christ the King Sunday and we’ve come to the end, of the Christian liturgical year. The year begins as we remember the longing of Israel for a savior and anticipate the return of Christ our King. It ends with Christ exalted. The Son of Man returns in

glory. He's even seated on the throne of his glory gathering the nations before him. The church calendar and Matthew's gospel have my attention! I am in awe.

But before we breathe a sigh of relief at this glorious return of God Incarnate Matthew has moved on. "And he will separate people." As Matthew recounts Jesus' description of the judgment day the awe is driven out of our hearts and minds. Fear takes awe's place. This vision of Jesus' return portrays Jesus sharing with us, from the throne of his glory, an alternate vision of the world here and now. God Incarnate has returned in glory and has to explain to us that he has been with us in glory the whole time. The problem is no one, not the righteous or the unrighteous, saw it!

You see, Jesus says, the Kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world was prepared for those who fed the hungry, gave fluids to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, and visited prisoners. And people, these activities are intimate encounters with me! O seekers of glory, tend to the mundane...there you will see me. Jesus had been teaching about the times flanked by his ascension and his return as judge. The part of the God's time in which we live. Lest we forget Jesus sent the Spirit to us at Pentecost, this text is a good reminder that Christ our King is our Living Lord. God is amongst us. God sustains us. God's glory is in our midst now!

Jesus relays commands for Christian living in the scriptures. Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Here, in this vision, he issues us an invitation. An invitation to be with him, to see him, to visit with him. "As you did it to the least of these...you did it to me." He shares this vision with his disciples before his death! He was holding a teach-in if you will. The righteous in the vision haven't the foggiest idea that they had visited or seen Jesus. Innocently they have done good works. The unrighteous can't recall ignoring Jesus. Where was he? Had they known he was there they would have gone and sought him out.

Jesus frequently challenged his disciples' presuppositions and conjectures about discipleship under him. The twelve apostles and the rest of the disciples in Jesus' day were given plenty of work that they didn't want to do during their time with Jesus. They were awed by the glory of their own visions of a savior often enough to forget that glory is found in submitting in humble obedience to God's will. They tell the children to leave Jesus alone; he tells them that those who inherit the Kingdom of God will receive it like a child. Remember James and John who asked to sit on each side of Jesus in God's eternal reign? Martha mad at her sister Mary for sitting around listening to Jesus' teachings while she prepared the meal? It took Jesus' disciples time to learn the shape glory took in God Incarnate. They learned as they followed Jesus on his journey to the cross. They slipped and stumbled and frustrated him. He knew they would. They didn't understand what true glory was; yet he loved them and lived and died to reconcile them to God.

In this vision shared in Matthew, Jesus calls us to live under his rule. So what about it? Is Christ among us? Can the glory of God reside in the inmate whose crime sickens our stomachs? In the vision the righteous didn't know Jesus was there when they visited prisoners. The unrighteous didn't think Jesus could be there so they never bothered

visiting. Maybe it is the disciples' job to go and find out! Visions and revelations are supposed to challenge and change us. Christ's call to know God at work in others is impossible to see on our own. But when have we ever been left alone? God is with us through the Spirit. The truth is that God finds us through others we would rather not interface with all the time. Why waste our time worrying about being a sheep or goat in the parable when Christ our Judge and King calls us to open our eyes and seek out his glory here and now?

One theologian summed up Jesus' revelation to his disciples claiming, "The scandal of the last day (as portrayed in Matthew) is that we are not judged on the basis of decisions about Jesus' lordship, but on the basis of living under that lordship."¹

Where is the glory of God found? On the cusp of Advent, this is a question each disciple must face. Where is the glory of God found? In our Savior who was willing to enter the world totally vulnerable to its whims and wishes. In the One who humbled himself each and every day to ultimately claim our lives and bodies as sacred. In Jesus, who suffered at the hands of others because he chose to identify himself with gluttons, prostitutes, the homeless, the sick and unclean—with us.

"Come visit with me" calls Jesus. I dare you to go out and serve the stranger! I have the right to push you because I am there waiting for you. I have your transformation in mind so come on. Homeless and prisoner, starving and sick, naked and thirsty, stranger and downtrodden—whoever the least of these is in your eyes, I will alter your perception as I make myself known through them. I guarantee you will never be the same or see the world in the same way.

Don't be a goat or a sheep as expressed in this vision. Have courage and be a disciple of the One in whom God's glory astounds us in humility, our Savior and King, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

¹ Douglas E. Wingeier, *Keeping Holy Time: Studying the Revised Common Lectionary Year A*, (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2001) 374.