

Last Sunday After Pentecost, Feast of Christ the King, November 22, 2020, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

"An Awesome King"

We live in a republic and we really have no idea what it is like to live under a king. We have a president, who, if we want to, we can vote out of office or re-elect after 4 years. We really do not know what it is like to be the subject of a king, and all that goes along with that. It is a completely foreign idea to most of us.

It is remarkable that in today's psalm, Psalm 95, we can see just what kind of King we do have, and then in today's Holy Gospel how that King rules His subjects. Psalm 95 shows us that our King is God Himself, the creator of the universe, who just happens to also be the Good Shepherd who cares for His sheep and longs for His people to hear and to respond to His voice. *"For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are all the depths of the earth, and the heights of the hills are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands prepared the dry land. O Come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts."* This is the same shepherd that Ezekiel speaks of in chapter 34 who will *"search for my sheep and look after them."* I think of the words of Jesus when He talks about the 99 and the one that He would go after to rescue. This shepherd cares for them, provides for them, and leads them to rest. This shepherd is also the Lamb of God, and the King in our Gospel message.

In today's Holy Gospel from Matthew, Jesus speaks of a King acting as a shepherd, who is just. Jesus gives us a vision of how the people will be divided up at judgment day just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. This is not a political statement but the sheep were put on the right and the goats on the left. He speaks to those on His right and says, *"Come, you who are blessed by My Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."* (Matthew 25:34) Then Jesus goes on to say, *"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."* (Matthew 25:35-36) The sheep, who were the people who had a good relationship with God, were puzzled by this. They said, *"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"* (Matthew 25:37-40) *"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'* (Matthew 25:40) How they treated others became as natural as getting up in the morning. But then there are those on the left, Jesus said to them, *"Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; I needed clothes and you did not clothe Me; I was sick, and in prison, and you did not look after Me."* (Matthew 25:41-43) Their big response was *"Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or needed clothes, or sick, or in*

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prison, and did not help You?” (Matthew 25:44) Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” (Matthew 25:45)
I think of a great Christian artist named Keith Green, who passed away – way too early in a plane crash with some of his kids at their ranch in Texas. He wrote a song called ‘The Sheep and the Goats’ – a seven-minute song in which he does this whole Gospel with a feeling of exasperation and surprise. “Lord when were you hungry, when were you thirsty?” Google it – Keith Green, The Sheep and the Goats, and amazing account of this Scripture.

When Jesus says, “*The least of these;*” they could be the poor, or maybe the homeless person who is living on the street and sleeping on the park bench or finding shelter under the railroad bridge. It might be the person who is not accepted by society because of mistakes or crimes they have done. And then there are people who cannot take care of themselves because of substance problems. It could be the adult or little child who is being mistreated or abused. It could be anyone who seems different from what we are expecting.

And then again, the “*least of these*” may be a non-believer. It could be someone who does not know Jesus yet. Through the eyes of our society we may have been given a picture of who is the “least” but it may not be entirely accurate. I think that there are times when we ALL fall into this category.

- Was there ever a time when you were hurting or in need and someone reached out to you or maybe they did not reach out to you?
- Was there a time when you just needed someone to talk to and thanks be to God someone was right there for you?
- Or maybe there was a time when you were worried about something and someone prayed for you or helped you in some other way?
- It may have been that you moved to a new town and needed some new friendship.

Think about when you might have been hungry, thirsty, a stranger in need of hospitality, in need of clothes, sick and in need of a caregiver, in prison – which could very well be on lock down or quarantine and no body called and somebody reached out to you? The importance of service - when and where service is needed is not overlooked by the King. Jesus says in Matthew 10:42, “*if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.*” This kind of love for others glorifies God by reflecting our love for Him which reflects His character in us! We often forget that we are created in His image – and even more so – we forget that the person next to you is also made in His image!

The author of Hebrews writes in chapter 6 verse 10 “*God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.*” Our King loves justice, enough to give us opportunities to serve others. I can tell you of the times when Deacon Bob has had to empty that box to bring to the Coffee County Food Bank. Thanks be to God for your generosity! In the past years when the Mary Hayes Center was

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open, it is now closed due to Covid and other things, we would have a box in the back during Advent which would be overflowing with unwrapped toys for these kids. George would have to empty it time and time again. I know I am preaching to the choir because of your faithfulness and your longing to help others. True justice is serving others who are made in the image of God, not judging, but serving – just as our King does, when you did for the least of these you were really doing it for Jesus!

Our King is filled with compassion for others and is not afraid to get involved. He stepped into time as a tiny baby and then grew into a man who would lay down His life willingly so that He could serve us and save us. That is not like any king I have ever heard of! He came to serve us. Jesus said in Mark 10:45 "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" On the night before He died on the cross, Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, our King washed the feet of His disciples. If you have ever washed anyone else's feet – it is not a lot of fun! Yet, Jesus did this for those He loved.

When you invite the King of Kings into your life, you may be in for some surprises! Anything you do for other people; you are REALLY doing for Him. The King will bring people across your path and create opportunities for you to help - opportunities that may cost you some time and possibly even some money. The reward is not of this world but it is in knowing that you have done for the King what He has asked you to do. That is what you were made for! I can tell you the number of times when Gray came into my office around Thanksgiving and Christmas asking if I knew anyone in need because "we have ham or turkeys that we want to give." Passionately he made sure that the people who needed – got them. I am not here to point out people who have done things, you all have done things. Thanks be to God!

In spite of what some people might think - there is not one of us who can save one soul. I get tired of hearing "evangelists" saying that I saved this person or that person – like it is a notch on a belt. We can introduce them to Christ, but it is the Holy Spirit that saves a soul – our King Jesus can and He does. Think of seed that is scattered – none of us can make it grow! We can help to scatter or sow it, we can water it, we can nurture it, we can pray for it, but we cannot make it grow. God, our King can and He does. How blessed we are that our King, who relies on us to be His hands and feet, and give us the opportunity for us to introduce people to His mercy, His love, and His saving grace – and then letting Him do the rest! We serve an awesome King!