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St. John's Episcopal Church
26th November 2017
Christ the King (Matthew 25:31-46)

Gracious Creator: We will crown him Lord, and call him King, but may we never forget that Jesus lives. Amen.

There's a pretty dualistic message in today's Gospel lesson: Sheep vs. Goats. Merciful vs. Stingy. Kind vs. Self-centered.

"If you did this for them, you did this for me."

"If you did not do this for them, you did not do this for me."

Not a lot of room for compromise. No time for ambiguity. Good-slash-bad. Sheep-slash-goats.

On the one hand, Matthew points to the end of the world as we know it, the judgment day, the day Jesus will return to earth, the end of all days.

Some call it the Rapture, but I won't go there...

On the other hand, Jesus points out that the King who belonged in heaven has been, in the person of Jesus, here on earth.

And he still is; for the Son of Man is here among us in the sons and daughters of humankind. "Inasmuch as you did it", says Jesus, "to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me" (Matthew 25.40). Are we surprised, even awed? We should be. "And see, I am with you, every day, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

Where is Jesus?

In the poor, the sick, the marginalized, the suffering, and the imprisoned; in the least of his brothers, his sisters — and in the least of ours.

Jesus is here among us – and outside those red doors, *on the streets*.

Can you see him? Do I see him?

How often are we tempted to ignore the person begging for money? How often are we tempted to turn away?

One of our homeless guests said, "Thank your congregation. Thank them for treating us like humans."

One could add, "Thank them for treating us like the Christ who is here among us."

In our political system, no matter how loudly they proclaim themselves *Christian*, there are those who forget that Jesus himself calls us to care for the poor, the homeless, the hungry, the sick. Oh, they're always ready to say they're "pro-life" when it comes to one issue, but there is a tragic loss of "pro-lifeism" when it comes to others. Support the elite, lie to the rest.

The poor have no voice. And too often the poor have no vote.

So we won't worry about them.

It's called anti-RobinHoodism. Steal from the poor, give to the rich.

Where is Jesus in this debate, O pious Christians?!?

Where is God's love?!?

Love is inconvenient. Jesus, to be sure, is *very* inconvenient. And so the powers that be will choose to ignore this passage from Matthew and it will be up to us, relying on the precarious resources of our own charity, to see the Christ who lives on the streets.

Maybe I'm asking too much. Maybe I'm asking too much to think that national resources should prioritize those who live on the margins. Maybe I'm asking too much to think that the health and well-being of *all* our people, especially those who have no allies, should be considered thoughtfully and with compassion. Maybe I'm asking too much to think that our fearless leaders might have hearts that are stirred by those who can't pull themselves up by the bootstraps because *they have no boots*.

OK, I didn't mean to be Debby Downer on Thanksgiving weekend, but there you are. The Gospel tells us what to do. The Gospel has become – and is always – political.

I think there's another point we may be missing – remember how the followers, the sheep, say "When?" The Rev. James Liggett suggests that in doing good – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, all those good, compassionate deeds – too often we may overlook seeing the Christ in the ones we serve. That is, people to whom we are giving aid – the poor, the hungry, the vulnerable – may not look like we imagine Christ to look. They may be angry, they may be ungrateful, they may dress and smell sort of different.

But Christ is there all the same. And it is seeing the Christ in the Other that will bring joy. We may become impatient or even burned out... and so we need to search for the Christ who is present.

Because Christ is alive – we just have to be aware. To be open to amazing possibilities. To look, to see, to welcome.

We are called to *see* the face of Jesus in the outcast, and we are called to *be* the hands of Christ in a world which needs so much more compassion. We are called to express the mind of Christ, working to rid our community, our nation, and the world, of injustice – poverty, human slavery and trafficking, legal oppression and simple human bigotry.

When we look, when we see, we will not need to ask, "When."

Because we will know it is "Now."

Christ has died, Christ is risen and is alive among us and among the poorest of the poor, the sickest of the sick, the most vulnerable and the most in need of our hands, our feet, our hearts.

Amen.