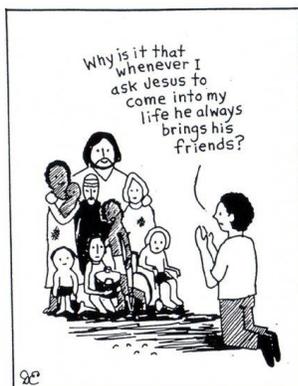


Christ the King Sunday. November 26, 2017. Dungeness Valley Lutheran, Sequim, WA. Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46. "Prescription? Description?"

31 '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. 32All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34Then 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; 35for 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, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" 40And 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." 41Then 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; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I 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." 44Then 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?" 45Then 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." 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

Let us pray: Brother, let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you. Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too. Amen.



I hope you enjoyed sweet Pastor Dan Erlander's cartoon on page 11 of the bulletin. You see a man on his knees praying. And there stands Jesus across from him: his arms around people in ragged clothes, people with disabilities, people of all colors. "Why is it," muses the man on his knees, "that whenever I ask Jesus to come into my life, he always brings his friends?"¹

¹ <http://danielerlander.com/freestuff/downloadable-artwork/why-does-jesus-bring-his-friends-along.html>

Pastor Erlander understood today's Gospel lesson. So did all the people who cooked Thanksgiving dinner this week for those without homes or family or substantial incomes. So do you who consistently share resources, time, patience, and listening ears for the good of this community. So do you who regularly drive, share meals with and visit the older members of our congregation. So do you who remember when your kids came home from school with hungry friends: how many peanut butter and jelly sandwiches or frozen pizzas did you provide! And with smiles on your faces because you loved those kids and their friends.

The story is told of the man who died and was offered a view of both heaven and hell. First, St. Peter took him to hell where he saw skinny, starving people seated at long tables filled with good food. They had long iron cuffs around their arms, so that their elbows did not bend. They could reach the food, but not bring it to their mouths. Then, the man was shown the heavenly banquet: the exact same tables, food, people with cuffs around their elbows. But there was smiling, cheerful conversation and everyone was healthy and well-fed. Whenever someone picked up food with her fork, she placed it into the mouth of her neighbor.

Jesus' story of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the nations of the world – like the story of the people with elbow cuffs -- is not as much about the end of the world as it is about how we live today. And they are not just stories of doing good works as much as they are – in the great tradition of our Scriptures – about grace. The grace that places good food within reach. The grace of the divine words, “Come, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.” Inheritances are not earned; they are granted, given, bestowed. So also are the resources we enjoy every day.

This parable could also be named, “The Great Surprise.” The “righteous” are surprised because the care they showed all their lives seemed like something simply natural that they do – hardly remembering that their generosity came from recognizing and trusting God's grace. The “unrighteous” who kept score all their lives, tight-fistedly counting every good deed or monetary gift, were surprised that score-keeping doesn't bring much satisfaction. The story gives us a picture of the end in order to help us do what is right and just and loving before the end. It's a promise of grace which enables us to participate fully in life here and now.

It's a *description* of how God's people act – much more than a *prescription* of how we should act. For our actions – important as they are – are not required for God to love us.

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Jesus' friends are NOT the rich and powerful. But then, why should we be surprised? Jesus was not born in Rome or Athens or even Jerusalem, but in a tiny,

backwater town in Palestine. This sure confused the wise men who were seeking him! Jesus did not live with princes, but with carpenters and shepherds. He didn't come with military might, but endured the shame and scandal and pain of the cross.

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For centuries the Church enjoyed power and glory. We might humbly say, we're not into power and glory; we're a small family church. But secretly we might not mind if we were the largest church in town, if we had two or three packed worship services each Sunday, several full-time staff members, a large hall overflowing with activities and programs and classes during the week. But maybe Jesus would be more comfortable in the struggling churches of today.

We glimpsed Jesus' glory throughout the green season of Pentecost to which we are bidding farewell today. All summer we saw Jesus perform miracles of healing, stilling storms, feeding thousands. Yet always he rejected becoming an earthly king. He is a servant, a man without a home of his own, a washer of feet.

Jesus points us to where we might least expect God to be – but if we know God through Jesus, we will find God among the homeless, the poor, the hungry and the imprisoned.

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We wring our hands over the conditions in our government and nation. We agonize when we listen to the news of wars, rumors of war, disasters, injustice across the world and at home.

We wish God would come in power and glory and make things right. Yet, it sounds as though God expects US to make things right. We may want to throw up our hands in helplessness. There are so many places where Jesus is showing up. In children who have trouble learning. In patients with terrible diseases. In refugees languishing in camps. In the college student who isn't getting along with his peers. In the teenager who doesn't feel as though she fits in. In our kids when they cause us pain. In our immigrant detention centers where mothers long for children who were quickly sent to relatives or friends or into foster care. I could go on and on.

Jesus promises to be always with and for those who are in greatest need – not in some distant eternal life but here and now – with comfort, yes, but also with wisdom, resources, and the courage to tackle hard tasks.

This means that if we want to experience God's presence fully, deeply, and truly, we will look for God in the need of those around us and in our own need as well.

When WE feel most overwhelmed with the needs of the world, when WE feel our own inadequacies most clearly, when WE cast about for solutions to problems we face every day – with finances, health, time, our spirits – then it can be a profound joy to know Jesus as friend and brother.

As shepherd of the sheep, Jesus offers to lift us and carry us on his own shoulders, shoulders both wounded and holy, shoulders both strong and vulnerable. As Shepherd king, Jesus reigns from the cross.

This is surprisingly good news: that God is with us today in the fellowship of broken people we call church and in the small gestures of mercy we offer and are offered every day. This may not be where we expect God to show up, but it is just where we need God to be. Look across the sanctuary and wave at those people you can see so clearly. They are where Jesus shows up.

God shows up in the water of Baptism splashed on Cheryl’s face. In the tiny taste of bread and sip of wine we receive in remembrance of Jesus. God shows up in the forgiveness, the comfort, the joy of renewed faith and life which we receive daily.

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We embark next Sunday on the seasons of Advent, Christmass and Epiphany. The everyday worrisome event of a young woman waiting through an unexpected pregnancy for the birth of a child: this humble story becomes infused with the glory – the glory! -- of the incarnation: the Word of God made flesh.

All this mix of glory and everyday life is yet one more opportunity to talk of God’s amazing way of turning human things upside down, of surprising us with the unexpected. Our Lord Jesus is born to poor people among animals and dies tortured between two thieves. Yet his executioner calls him a King **and God raises him from death to eternal LIFE. You and I remember each day our own weaknesses, brokenness, and sins worthy of despair; yet we are forgiven and offered life in God’s realm. Jesus has a way of surprising us!**

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When you ask, “Lord, when were you hungry and I fed you?” You might hear Jesus say, “How could you ask that, you of the 3 million peanut butter and jelly sandwiches?”

Or you might ask, “Lord, I never visited you in prison. I’ve never gone to a prison.” And you might hear, “Oh, yes, you did. I was imprisoned in my littleness, behind the bars of my crib and I cried out in the night and you came. I was imprisoned inside a 12-year old body exploding with emotions and no longer knew myself and you loved me into becoming who I am today. I was imprisoned behind

my cell phone and you took the abuse I heaped upon you and waited in love for me to open the door.”

“Now, come, you that are blessed by my Father -- you friends of Jesus – live fully in the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Amen.

Good Outtake!

Walt Wangerin (The Lutheran, October 1993) tells of showing his young daughter Mary around St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. It is glorious! They admired the stained glass windows, the architecture, the saints and martyrs, the golden altars. As they walked, they encountered an old woman small and hunched all out of proportion, gray and frail. She walked very slowly, dragging a bag made from a worn pillowcase. Walt’s young daughter kept asking him as she gazed around the cathedral, “So where IS Jesus?”

The old woman crept past them into a side chapel, dipped her finger into the holy water, genuflected and moved to the altar rail where she stopped and slowly sank to one knee. After a few minutes she rose and labored to the exit, never raised her eyes, turned back to genuflect once again before she continued her slow and sorrowful walk. “Where IS Jesus?” asked Mary. “There, Mary, there in that woman,” said her father.