"When Was It?"

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."

When Was It?

Matthew 25:31-46

November 22, 2026

Rev. Michael Catanzaro

I.

The context of this morning's service is the celebration of Christ, specifically, as King. As we have explored many times before, great efforts have been made to more fully fathom the person we understand to be *both* the incarnate son of God, Jesus, and the long prophesied and awaited Messiah, the Christ. One aspect of these past efforts is the great many varied and diverse Christological titles found scattered throughout the New Testament. These include: Christ, Lord, Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, Lamb of God, Logos or the Word, Light of the world, Rabbi, New or Second Adam, Bread of Life, Prophet, Healer, Miracle Worker, Teacher, the Alpha and Omega (Beginning and End), Shepherd, carpenter, carpenter's son, the "I Am," Son of Mary, Savior, Redeemer, Emmanuel, suffering servant, High Priest, and, of course, Christ the King.

II.

Over the centuries, of course, the focus of ecclesiastical and scholarly attention to these various titles has shifted any number of times, usually in response to humanity's ever-changing geo-political, social, and spiritual states of being. It is curious, then, that the focus of Christ as *King* is a relatively new development, with Pope Pious the XI instituting a feast day only as recently as 1925. In his encyclical, or circulating letter, *Quas Primas*, Pious cites the thinking of 5th century church Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria and states, "*Jesus' kingship was given to him by the Father, and was not obtained by violence. "'Christ,'* he says, *'has dominion over all creatures, a dominion not seized by violence nor usurped, but his by essence and by nature.'"*

III.

Following the devastation of the "War to end of all Wars," and amid the ensuing political chaos which eventually gave rise to fascism, nazism, communism, the holocaust, the cold war, and the seeds of discord which would be sown by the establishment of the State of Israel, Pious attempts to spurn the church to action in opposition to the rising tides of nationalism and secularism. Kind of a strange way to go about it. Or, perhaps, an *ingenious*

way to go about it. The Latin *Quas Primas*, is translated "As The First," referencing Pious' initial encyclical, *Ubi Arcano Dei Consillio*, "The Hidden Counsel of God," and expands on the theme of the peace of Christ in his Kingdom.

IV.

Pious XI writes:

We remember saying that these manifold evils in the world were due to the fact that the majority of men (sic) had thrust Jesus Christ and his holy law out of their lives; that these had no place either in private affairs or in politics: and we said further, that as long as individuals and states refused to submit to the rule of our Savior, there would be no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations. Men (sic) must look for the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ; and that We promised to do as far as lay in Our power. In the Kingdom of Christ, that is, it seemed to Us that peace could not be more effectually restored nor fixed upon a firmer basis than through the restoration of the Empire of Our Lord.

Not a bad plan. Not then, and not a bad plan now.

V.

Each year, as we move into Advent, Christ the King Sunday helps us to remember and contextualize the hope we place in the birth a child born in a humble stable to unwed parents. This isn't just a quaint story, or a means to one's personal salvation. Instead, as we read in Isaiah ch. 9, it is the herald of a whole new way of being in the world:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us, a son given; authority rests upon his shoulders. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.

For Pope Pious, and those of his ilk, the Empire of the Lord is not just one path to justice and righteousness, it is the *only* path. It is the only solution, then and now, to the social and political strife which plagues this world, and the polarization which currently plagues our nation.

VI.

Sometimes, though, such grandiosity of hope is too large to comprehend. Especially amid the busyness of the holiday season when "Peace on earth, good will to all" is the *last* thing for which we have the time. So, today, I would like to change the scale of the paradigm. We will retain the dynamics of the matter, but trade it in for a more manageable form.

In case you have forgotten your Greek mythology, I would like to review the story of Narcissus. The son of a river God and a nymph, Narcissus was a great hunter and renowned for his beauty, though he had nothing but distain for those who loved him. Taking notice of his hubris and arrogance Nemesis, the goddess of retribution, lures Narcissus to a pool where, in the water, he sees his own reflection and falls in love with it. Unable to take leave of the sight of his own beauty, Narcissus drowned. From this myth comes the word narcissism, the fixation with oneself.

VII.

In his book, The Narcissism Epidemic, author Jean Twenge endeavors to convince the reader that the number of people in our country who are self-promoting and self-absorbed is increasing to the point of epidemic proportions and having far reaching negative consequences. You think? Normally, I would pass by such a book (being taken with my own life and ideas) but I was struck by the insight of Twenge's definition of a narcissist: someone given to grandiosity, maintains an acute sense of entitlement, and (the take away) is profoundly lacking in *empathy*. For reasons both personal and professional, this last one really struck a chord in me.

VIII.

As a parent, it was a tremendous struggle to raise children who harbor an abiding awareness of, and care for the well-being of others. Teaching them to be empathetic is really rather straightforward. However, instilling such values in them and sending them out into the world was absolutely gut-wrenching. There were too many days when Linda and I sat and listened to our kids matter-of-factly tell of their experiences in elementary, middle, high school, and college only to come away thinking that we have actually put our kids at a serious disadvantage in life by raising them to be sensitive to the needs of

others, even above their own. At the very least, Linda and I certainly gave them a rough road to hoe. Moreover, it seems to be getting rougher.

IX.

As a pastor, I admit I am absolutely baffled not only about the seeming lack of interest in the church, especially among some in the emerging generations but, moreover, the the absence of deference paid to the church, across the board, with respect to the good the church does in the world. I suppose, though, if you really are not all that concerned with others why would you care about an institution which holds others as their primary concern? It is a head-scratcher, to be sure, and a heart-breaker as well. I cannot decide if this is the disease or the symptom, the cause or the effect? Is it just the latest fashion in social disfunction, or is it a direct, linear, and cumulative consequence of a broken world which, as Pious says, "*has thrust Jesus Christ and his holy law out of their lives; that these had no place either in private affairs or in politics.*"

X.

So, amid all of this, today's celebration of Christ as King, and today's scripture passage from Matthew 25, begin to take on a whole new light. Jesus is telling a parable of a day of reckoning, when the King shall gather all the nations and separate out those who shall inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world; and, those who shall inherit it not. At issue, is the criterion for inheritance. Interestingly, *both* groups seem to be at a loss to understand what has, in the first instance, gained them entry or, in the second instance, caused them to be accursed. Neither group saw it coming, or recognized it in the moment.

XI.

The righteous ask, "'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.' Similarly, the accursed shall ask, "'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

the King 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*.'

XII.

It would seem, then, that the criterion for entrance to the Kingdom, whether you like it or not, whether you are aware of it or not, is *empathy*. Why? Because the *King* is in charge, and this is what the *King* has decided. That, really, is the thrust of what Pope Pious XI tried to convey in his encyclical *Quas Primus*. Moreover if, in fact, we do have an epidemic of narcissism in this country it is an epidemic of self-delusion which ignores the King and keeps us staring at our own image as we prevent ourselves from noticing the needs of the world all around us or doing anything about them.

XIII.

As we move into the season of Advent I would like to leave you with a reiteration of these words of Pope Pious XI: *"People must look for the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ; and what We promised to do as far as lay in Our power."* Advent is a time of hope for world. Hope for a world ruled not with self-absorption but one alive with justice and peace. Only God can usher in such a world and we believe that, even now, the kingdom is dawning. As such a day breaks, seemingly distant on the horizon but with just enough light to begin to chase away the shadows of night, let us be empathetic to needs of the world the people in it, and remember that as subjects of the King we have promised to do what lay in *our* power to both live *in* God's Kingdom and work to *bring about* God's Kingdom.

XIV.

And they asked, '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?' As members of *this* congregation it was when you decided to support the work and mission of this church. Through the Farm Family Offering, the Pentecost Offering, the Mission Budget, your support of the C&CP, the work of the Deacons, the food you donate, and the resources you offer to enable our church to provide gas to a stranded traveler, fuel to warm homes, food to ease hunger, sanctuary and solace to those who are troubled, and joy to kids at

Christmas. When was it? It was yesterday, it is today. Let us do whatever it is necessary to make sure it will be tomorrow as well. Amen.