

“When the Son of Man Comes in All His Glory”

Matthew 25: 31-46

Today, we come to the end of our liturgical church year with Christ the King Sunday. Normally, this Sunday is not one we Disciples celebrate. Usually we skip over it and head right on into Advent. But this year...this year, the calendar added an extra week between Thanksgiving and the First Sunday in Advent so we find ourselves with a little extra time to contemplate what it means to proclaim Christ as our King.

Now I'll admit this doesn't seem like a huge difference for us as people of faith. After all, each Sunday, we make statements like Lord of Lords and King of Kings about Jesus in some shape or fashion. So why is this Sunday any different?

It is different because we've been building up to this moment. Each week as we have heard the different stories about who Jesus is, stories about his preachings, stories about how his teachings transformed people and showed them the very presence of God in their midst, each week as we have heard different stories about who Jesus is, we have been building to this very moment when Jesus ascends onto his heavenly throne, gathering the nations around him, surrounded by the angels so that all would know who Jesus is. And now here it is and we as his disciples are invited to watch the ripple effects this very action has upon our world.

This Sunday is different because it is the moment we as the people who have experienced the power and might of God's humbling grace, this is the moment we proclaim with a confidence grounded in hope that ultimately we know who will overcome in the end. This Sunday is different because it is the moment we proclaim that death and darkness do not have the last word now or ever. All because our God was and is and forever will be among God's people, working to bring about healing and wholeness for all of God's children.

This really is an amazing statement of our faith which we make today. It is a powerful life changing statement of faith and to be honest, it is really disheartening to know that it takes a special Sunday and a little extra time in our calendar for us Disciples make such a powerful statement about who Jesus is to us.

As I have thought about why this is, I can only say that it must have something to do with our general dislike of labels and hierarchy in our institutions. What I mean by this is that in most denominations, there is a Bishop or a Cardinal, even a Pope who gives rulings on things the church should say about any given issues. But for Disciples of Christ, we don't have that. Yes, I know we have a General Minister and President in Indianapolis but the fact of the matter is, Indianapolis doesn't speak for our congregations. As a denomination, we are congregationally lead which means the people sitting in the pews are the authorities. Did you catch that? We as members of the Disciples of Christ

denomination hold that all are ministers who have the authority to say who Jesus is for us as God's people. Using our Bibles and our experiences, we are called to proclaim to the world who we know Jesus to be. He is our Christ. He is our King. He is our Lord of Lords. He is the one who upon the cross died so that we might live. It is our Christology just in case you want to impress someone with a big fancy churchy kind of word. As Disciples of Christ, we are the authorities when it comes to matters of theology, called as individuals to make profound statements of faith about who Jesus is and why his coming to the world was necessary.

And I think that is exactly what makes us uncomfortable about Christ the King Sunday and why we try to avoid it year after year. It forces us to label just exactly who Jesus is in pretty big theology terms. We are okay with talking about Jesus being a man who shows us a different way. We are okay with talking about the human side of Jesus. This makes him real. This makes him relatable. But when we as Disciples start using big churchy words, we fall short and claim to be no experts in theology, saying we are leaving that for the people who are trained to know.

So when matters of faith or theology come up in conversation and we are asked our opinion, we often say, "Oh well, I'm no expert. Ask someone who would know," Or we say, "You don't want to know what I think. It is not really deep or profound. What I think about Jesus is pretty basic and certainly not going

to change anyone's life." I honestly think we as Disciples believe that if we say stuff like this in response to big theological questions and conversations, we can avoid confrontations or heaven forbid, being wrong when the opposite is actually true.

What I am coming to realize is that in our reluctance as Disciples to proclaim just exactly who Jesus is for us, who Jesus is to us, others are filling in the gaps. And they are filling in these gaps in with dangerous and hurtful theology and practices. They have no problem claiming the authority to decide who is in and who is out. They have no qualms in saying that if we don't believe just exactly as they believe than we are wrong. With this mantle of authority with they claim, they offer no grace. They offer no mercy. They ignore the life changing power of God's love. They actually offer up a Jesus who is a direct opposite of the Jesus we have come to know and experience in our lives...our understanding after reading the sacred text being that Jesus welcomed the sinner and the saint alike, that Jesus cared for those on the margins, our understanding being that Jesus challenged the very systems which perpetuate injustice in our world.

As Disciples of Christ, in our reluctance to proclaim Jesus Christ as our King, others have stepped in to do so, preaching a theology of hate and division which has lead to more and more brokenness, more and more hurt. This has led to more and more people turning away from the very life changing life giving

transformative presence of God in their midst, something that goes against our very nature as Disciples who proclaim all are welcome.

So I thought since we are beginning a new year per se, today would be the perfect day to change all that. It is time we share our understanding of what it means to proclaim Christ as our King as Disciples of Christ. In order to do that, we need to become more comfortable with claiming our authority. Yes I know this is not something we normally like to do. But in order to make this task a little easier, I'm going to let everyone in on a secret. Here it is....Are you ready for it? Each and every one of us is already an expert in the matters of who Jesus is to us, in the matters of who Jesus is for us... because each and every one of us has had our lives transformed by the powerful love of Jesus Christ. We know that we are named and claimed as Beloved Children of God. Each and every one of us has had that moment, that moment when we were so overwhelmed by the darkness that we didn't know which way to turn and just when we had lost all hope, we hear a voice, calling us home. We felt a hand lifting us up, bringing us back to the light. Each and every one of us has had a moment when God's grace and God's love took hold of us and opened our eyes to the beauty and wonder of God's Kingdom in our midst.

That's it. Those moments when God's grace and God's love transformed us and challenged us to become the people God created and calls us to be. Those

moments are already what make us experts in matters of faith. That is what already makes us authorities when it comes to who Jesus is for us, who Jesus is to us. All of us have experienced the life giving power of God's love in our lives and we know, we know that Christ is our King, our Lord and Savior, the very one who will overcome all because we have experienced the power and might of God's humbling grace in our lives.

Which is why this text is so perfect for such a Sunday. Matthew contrasts this beautiful awe inspiring vision of Christ ascending to his throne in heaven with simple everyday ordinary tasks of how we can live out these proclamations in our lives as Jesus' disciples. He reminds his community, he reminds us that we are not called to bring about God's Kingdom by ourselves. That's God's job. As Jesus disciples living here on earth, what we are asked to do is to live out our faith, to share God's love with others by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, welcoming the stranger, and visiting the imprisoned. We are called to proclaim Christ our King through our words and our actions.

Matthew reminds all of us that sometimes the biggest statements we can make in proclaiming who Christ is to us and for us as his followers is by simply sharing acts of kindness with the people around us, by simply noticing the least of these in our midst and seeing them as Beloved Children of God which they are.

Sometimes in world that is driven to achieve power and might, in world which filled with noise, in a world where bigger is always better, sometimes the best thing we can do as disciples of Christ is proclaim him as our King by loving our neighbors as ourselves, knowing that our God has already overcome any darkness we might face.

Because you see, all the missions, all the acts of justice which we do as people of faith is not for ourselves. We don't give our resources to this ministries to make us feel better about ourselves. Nor do we do them to make others think we are the best Christians ever. No, we do these acts of justice because through them, we meet Christ. Because through them, God's Kingdom comes to fruition just a little more each time. Because through them, we make statements about who Jesus is for us. We proclaim loud and clear that he is our King. That he is our Lord of Lords, Ruler of all nations. That he is our Prince of Peace who came so that all would know the glory of our God.

As Jesus' disciples, we feed the hungry, visit those in prison, tend the sick, clothe the naked, and welcome the stranger because through them, we see the ripple effects they have on our world, bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's children, knowing that with each act of justice, with each act of Kindness, God's Kingdom becomes a reality here on earth.

So today and all days, may we never again hesitate to proclaim Christ as our King because let's face it, we already know how the story ends. Thanks be to God!
Amen.