Reign of Christ Sunday 26th Sunday after Pentecost

Prayer of the Day
O God of power and might, your Son shows us the way of service, and in him we inherit the riches of your grace. Give us the wisdom to know what is right and the strength to serve the world you have made, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46
[Jesus said to the disciples:] 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. 32 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, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, 35 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, 36 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.' 37 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? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' 40 And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.' 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 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.' 44 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?' 45 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.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life."

Reflections-

The press are quoting some newly elected leaders in the U.S. describing themselves as "Matthew 25 Christians". What a refreshing emphasis after so much racket from White Nationalist "Christians" and from those who say the Beatitudes are too 'woke'! Caring for the vulnerable in tangible ways is hard work so those committing themselves to this path are to be commended! Changing our mindset from 'charity' for those we deem not as good as we are to caring for people as if they are Jesus himself is a seismic shift (to use a popular idiom).

These musings lead me to a few comments on the parable Jesus tells. First, the judgement (and why do we always assume that a sentence immediately follows the verdict?) will be of all nations. Individuals certainly have a calling to care for other humans. As I read the Daily Office this morning, something in the prayers and lessons prompted me to think that caring for other creatures and for the planet itself could fit into the ethic of "Matthew 25" Jesus followers.

Second, many commentators point to the fact that neither those who provide care nor those who do nothing realize the broader implications of their action or inaction. Maybe this insight leads us to think more about that 'seismic shift' as we consider our motivation for caring for others.

Third, this parable shares a literary device with the previous parables about talents and wedding banquets. The verdict is against those who do nothing (fail to bring oil for their lamps or bury the talent they've been given). So the warning we inherit is against "quietism" which embraces the tenets of the faith without acting on them. Martin Luther worries we would get the wrong idea about good works as being what 'saves us'. His struggle to resolve this aversion to what he calls 'works righteousness' leads to his very compelling conclusion that has been paraphrased, "God doesn't need your good works. Your neighbour does".(Martin Luther's reflections on vocation in his 1520 work titled Freedom of a Christian) As a corollary, I would add God cares about our neighbour and calls us to love our neighbour as ourselves.

The intended audience in Matthew's Gospel is the church. As the commentator Warren Carter reminds us, the church was very much on the margins and not in a position of power. Yet the parables are for those living in a 'contrast society' from imperial power. Rather than 'gaining more power" as a mandate, the church's mandate is to care for "the least of these". If this mandate is likened to the talent

entrusted to the workers, then the church is summoned to actions large and small as befits our situation and our abilities.

This Sunday we observe “Christ the King Sunday” which is an observance barely 100 years old. The pope at the time wanted to proclaim Christ as King rather than Italy’s Benito Mussolini and Germany’s Adolph Hitler whose power was growing and destabilizing their respective countries (before they seized formal power a decade later).

A present-day distortion of the pope’s proclamation that Christ is King is occurring in the aftermath of the U.S. elections. Groups from what’s been dubbed the religious right are meeting to strategize. The news media report one such group is emphasizing Jesus as king and then interpreting the kingdom as a force that will marginalize people of colour, of all genders, and of all creeds other than their own. It seems to me that the “Matthew 25 Christians”—and we might be among them—have their work cut out for them!

This weekend, both congregations will be worshipping using Service of the Word and we have made available a sermon written by the Rev. Victoria Scott, who presently serves as an honourary assistant priest at Christ Cathedral in Ottawa.