

“Go there! Do that!”

Matthew 25:31-46

November 26, 2017

Christ the King Sunday

This morning, we have before us one of those Gospel passages that requires little in the way of explanation. The passage is itself the sermon and it preaches to us eloquently and unambiguously about what God’s expectations of us are, about how God expects us to live our lives as his people, his **ministers** who are about the business of **ministry** to others.

Do you see yourself that way, as a person who, above all else, is about the business of **ministry** to others? Or, to say it more directly, do you see yourself as a **minister**? *No, you don’t get to wear this cool white collar*, but you are to be *no less ministers* than am I, ordained by God to serve others. Let’s talk this morning about you, about how you see yourself in relation to this passage from Matthew.

This is a passage about ministering to others and the consequences for us when *we do*, and the consequences for us when *we don’t*. These are words of expectation and invitation and-no getting around it-of judgment. And the message could not be clearer. We are told here that, as individuals and by extension, as a congregation, **we will be judged by God on the basis of our ministry to others**, particularly to those who are hungry and thirsty, who are strangers, who are without decent clothing and shelter, who are sick and imprisoned. That is to say, we will be judged on the basis of our ministry to *others in need*. If we are judged as having ministered to others in need, we will be welcomed into the Kingdom. And, if we have *not* ministered to others, *this passage says, “we will go away to eternal punishment.”*

Now, we have to stop right here for just a minute. Most credible biblical scholars say that, for numerous reasons, these words about being condemned to eternal punishment are words which later revisionists put into the mouth of Jesus; that is, Jesus would never have said this. Why? Because these words about condemnation are totally antithetical to the message of grace that Jesus preached. But, that doesn’t mean we throw the baby out with bath water. What is essential in this passage is that **Jesus says he takes personally how we treat others**. It’s as though we are treating him in the same way. Now, *that* Jesus may very well have said.

And, that should come as no surprise to us. We know that this is what we are supposed to be about as the people of God, as a Christian congregation. At College Church we do indeed carry on a variety of ministries to those in need. We, as a congregation, *are* ministering to the hungry, the sick, the homeless. And, all of us, through our gifts of time, talent and money participate in the overall ministry of this congregation. Those who serve on committees, the Congregation Council, who work with youth, who teach Sunday School, who sing in the choir and who mow the lawn are all part of this congregation’s outreach and ministry to those in need, directly or indirectly. So, can we, as a congregation, give ourselves at least a passing mark? Yes, I think so. Could we do more? Oh, yes, I think so!

But now, if you were to evaluate ***yourself, individually, in terms of your ministry to others***, how would you fare? Certainly, many of you who are able are involved in one kind of ministry or another. Are you? Before you answer that, let us be reminded that, as we just said, our ministry to others in need is ministry very personally taken by *Christ himself*. We cannot ask the question that those surprised “goats” in the passage ask, “Lord, when did we see *you...*” because we know that this is *Christ himself* whom we are serving every time we minister to another in need.

You know, a lot of people (not any of us of course) do what they do for fear of that eternal punishment; so, they need to keep racking up the points to insure they get put with the sheep and not with the goats. Pah-leeze, throw that old works righteousness nonsense out of the window! Do you what you do, not out of fear and in order to be saved, but out of joy because you have been saved.

Rather than have the fear of judgement, as our motivator, there is, or *can be*, incredible joy in ministering to others in need. *Your ministry should bring you joy! And your joy should fuel your passion! And, your passion should radiate like the sun so everyone can see it, and be joyful with you and for you.*

So, look, whatever you may be doing to serve others,
 if you find no joy in it, stop doing it!
 If it drags you down instead of lifting you up, stop doing it!
 If you dread it, instead of eagerly looking forward to it, stop doing it!
 If it has become an unhappy “chore” which you don’t like doing,
 well, then, stop doing it!

Stop doing these things and search for that ministry about which you *are* passionate, or think you might become passionate. Let me give you just one good example. You see these beautiful Reformation banners? Two words: Lois Hinkle. Here is a member of our congregation who is passionate about using her wonderful skills to enhance our worship space. That’s a joyful ministry for her!

So, surprise yourself. No matter what it may be. No matter where it takes you. And, let me tell you, “Inaweza kuwa mbali na hapa!” That’s Swahili for, “It could be far from here!” Wherever it is, go *there*, do *that!* Find that ministry which gives you joy. Remembering that to minister to others in need is to minister to Christ, himself. And, in that, you will surely find great joy!

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