
"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. [32] Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. [34] Then the King will say to those on his right, '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 drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' [37] Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? [38] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? [39] And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' [40] And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' [41] "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, 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 no drink, [43] I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' [44] Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' [45] Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, 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."

"Christ the King Is Coming"

"The West Wing" was a popular television program that documents the life in the White House. All of the intrigue and events of the day are reflected in the weekly episode. This past week I watched one of the reruns from and the episode began with the president faced with another of many "situations". He is

whisked off to the situation room in the basement of the White House, a room that is entered only after your palm print is read by a plate on the wall.

The Swiss ambassador has brought word from Iraq that the son of the Ayatollah has a congenital heart condition that requires a heart and lung transplant. The U.S. is the only country in the world that has done it successfully and the brother-in-law of the Ayatollah is asking for help.

All the political advisors gathered around the table are debating the political ramifications, how doing the operation or not doing it, will be read by public opinion, how it will be seen by political groups inside and outside of Iraq. What was the cost, how could we make use of this? Even Leo Magary, the president's top advisor, suggests that they use this incident to stop Iraq's missile program. President Bartlett explodes, "This is a 15 year-old non-combatant on the way to the hospital. Imagine a big red cross on that airplane, it will not be turned around."

The next problem is that the only surgeon available is a refugee from Iraq. His father was tortured by Iraq and his family still lived there. President Bartlett turned to his wife, a heart doctor, for advice. She said, "He doesn't have a choice. He is a doctor, and a doctor will treat the patient right in front of him." The surgery was done.

For the President, it was not a question of politics - it was just something that decent human beings did for other human beings. You might have thought the writers read this text when they wrote this episode. This is Christianity 101. It can and does get more complicated than this, but it never gets more important. For the first and clearly the last question that is asked is, "Who did you help?"

The world loves nothing more than to leave you thinking that you are a nobody, an inconsequential mote of dust in this vast universe. And on more than one scale, they are absolutely right. Of all the people who have ever lived, of all the planets circling

stars in the countless galaxies of our universe, we are rather insignificant. No great monuments will mark my tomb and no star noticed my birth. But faith knows another truth. God, the omnipotent creator of this universe, has made you, individually, important to himself. He holds you in his hand and delights in you. Imagine yourself at the inauguration of the President. You are standing among the vast crowds of people, far behind the senators and the congressmen, behind the visiting ambassadors and dignitaries from around world. After he takes that oath of office he turns around and looks right at you and you make eye contact with him and you know that it was important that you were there.

The really cool thing about God is that he is infinite. He can do this with more than one person, in fact he can do it with all persons, but that doesn't mean it is somehow diluted. God is delighted that you, the individual that you are, have come here

today and on that last day, he will judge the whole world based on how it treated you. In as much as you did this to the least of these my brothers, you did it for me. I have no idea what that will look like at the end of time, but I do know that Jesus just said that I am terribly important to himself.

"If you give a cup of cold water to the smallest of my brothers" That phrase has often been used as something of a club to guilt us into social action. But in truth, this word was meant as a word of comfort to its first audience and to us. We are the small brothers of Christ, the folks the world sees as insignificant and worthless, but Jesus does not. No little act of kindness goes unnoticed by him. He receives them all gratefully for your sake.

I am not so arrogant as to tell you exactly what that means for the unbeliever on the last day who shows me kindness today. That belongs to Jesus to decide. He separates the sheep from

the goats. But he assures me, I am even there, at the center of his picture, foremost in his mind. I am important to God.

This also has a profound implication for the actions which we then take regarding our neighbors, both those inside and those outside the fellowship of Christ. He has shed his blood for all humanity. They are all his brothers on that account. We need not fear whether we are sheep or goats. He has declared us to be the people of God, the brothers. We are the sheep; he is the shepherd. That is an image which Jesus uses frequently to describe himself.

But now, we also learn that Jesus who is watching everything which happens to us, is also watching everything that we do. My gift of a cup of cold water, my can of soup given to the food bank, my blanket made for refugees in Sudan, my offering, my arm put around a weeping co-worker, these are also delighting to God. He notices these things. They are holy moments when God

is present in this world. We can connect this to the Ezekiel text this way. God himself will take care of his sheep.

There are folks who don't do this, they are goat-like.

Christ's presence in my life, his declaration of who I am, does change me. It has made me a different sort of person. God's unconditional love does not leave me in the same sinful condition in which he finds me.

Today's text makes it clear, if there is someone in need of love, we are given the opportunity to love. We love because we know what it is to be loved. We love because that is simply what children of God do, what Christians do. May we live each day looking for ways to share the love of God with others and guess what. When you least suspect it, there will be the surprise.

"Come, you blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world." Amen.