

Proper 29 A 2017  
November 29, 2017 :: Matthew 25:31-46  
Fr. Jim Cook

## *“Christ the King. Christ the Pauper.”*

Today is the last Sunday on the Church’s calendar. The new year, starting with the season of Advent, begins next Sunday. We mark that change in a variety of ways. We change from Year A in our roster of Sunday readings to Year B. The color of our vestments will change from the green of Pentecost to the Purple of Advent. You will even see some changes to the order of our worship service.

But today is a special day; you might have noticed that, although we are still in the season of Pentecost, our colors are not green but white. Today is the feast day of Christ the King. Today we affirm the kingship of Jesus in our lives. However, this is something we have been affirming each Sunday, when we recite these words from the Nicene Creed:

“He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end” (*Book of Common Prayer*, page 359).

And so, Jesus is our king, but he is an unusual king. There are no fancy robes or crowns for him. No army awaits his orders. There are no grand processions or parades when he moves about from place to place. He has no castle or palace; in fact, he has no place to lay his head.

Instead, as we heard in today's gospel reading, he claims to be among the poor, and the hungry, and a stranger, and in prison, and among the sick, and the thirsty, and the homeless. And he says to us:

“When you see someone like that, you are seeing me. They are me. I am them. And to serve me you must serve them. In fact, you can offer me no greater service than to serve them.”

But sometimes we forget what we're supposed to do. So, to help us understand our unique role in Christ's kingdom, the Prayer Book offers us a job description. I'd like for us to look at it, so, if you would, please open your Prayer Books to page 855.

Beginning at the third “paragraph” from the top of the page, I’ll read the questions if you would please read the answers.

Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

**A. The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.**

Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?

**A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons.**

Did you notice who was listed first among the ministers of the church? Lay persons! The ministry of the laity is listed before the ministry of either bishops, priests, or deacons, because the ministry of the laity is the foundational ministry of the church. The final question is this:

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

**A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given to them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.**

Did you catch those words "...according to the gifts given them..."? That's what Jesus is talking about. God equips us to do the work he calls us to do. Just as someone once said:

"If God leads you to it, he will prepare you for it."

And so, God gives us gifts, but he doesn't give all of us the same gift. But all the different gifts are equally important. And we are expected to do no more, but no less, than that for which God has equipped us. And so much of the life of faith for the Christian

is about discerning and using these gifts to carry on Christ's work in the world.

Now, today's gospel reading presents us with a parable that tells us that there will come a day when Jesus will ask us how well we've been doing with our gifts of ministry. But in fact, that question is being asked of us every day, and even right now. And if we're absolutely honest, most of us would have to admit that we're not doing all that well. And the reason is understandable, though clear: Often there seems to be too much to do. There are just too many hungry and poor and lonely people for us to make any difference. How can one person hope to make a dent in such a large number?

Well, there's an interesting story told about the scientist and writer, Loren Eisely. This story has been circulated in a variety of forms, so you've probably heard it. But I think it's good to hear it in its original form.

Loren Eisely was in the south of France, on the coast, attending a scientific symposium. He woke early one morning and went for a walk on the beach before sunrise. As he moved through

the misty dawn he focused on a faint, far away figure. It was a youth, bending and reaching and flinging his arms, seemingly dancing on the beach. And Eisely thought, “No doubt he is dancing in celebration of the new day about to begin.”

As he came nearer, he realized the youth was not dancing at all, but rather was bending to sift through the debris left by the night tide, stopping now and then to pick up a starfish and then, standing, heaving it back into the sea. He asked the young man the purpose of the effort. “The tide has washed the starfish onto the beach, and they cannot return to the sea by themselves,” the young man replied. “When the sun rises, they will die, and the people come from town to pick them and sell them in the market place. I throw them back to the sea so they might live another day.”

As the youth explained, Eisely surveyed the vast expanse of beach, stretching in both directions beyond his sight. Starfish littered the shore in numbers beyond calculation. The youth’s plan seemed hopeless. “But there are more starfish on this beach than you can ever save before the sun is up,” Eisely said. Surely you cannot expect to make a difference?”

The youth paused to consider his words, then bent to pick up a starfish, whirled around and threw it as far as possible into the water. Turning to the scientist he said simply, “I made a difference to that one,” and kept dancing down the beach.

Eisely went back to his room, and the conference. All his life he had understood the coming and going of life to be part of the way of the universe. Natural selection. Until he saw the young man on the beach, it had never occurred to him how important it is for one creature to help another, and how the seemingly natural order of things might be dramatically altered by the simple actions of one person.

The next morning, Eisely awoke, and again went down to the sea before dawn. There he joined the youth in the dance of life, one starfish at a time! Never before had he felt so alive, and so connected to our Creator God.

Whatever talents we have each been given, they are more than sufficient for us to do our part in the dance of life. Each simple action of our lives can make a difference in carrying on Jesus’ work of reconciliation in the world.

We are the people who carry out the mission of the church, which is the mission of Jesus, our unusual king. And this is what we call “life in his kingdom.”

Bending, reaching, flinging our arms, one starfish at a time, we bring ourselves closer to others, closer to God, and closer to ourselves.

Amen.