

Christ, the King Sunday is always our last Sabbath of the year
Next Sunday begins the Church's New Year: Advent!
Our Gospel this morning is about the Second Coming and the Day of
Judgment:

"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. All the nations will be gathered before him..."

It's "Judgment Day! What comes to mind?"

For me a vision will probably always be influenced by the 3rd & 4th grade boys Sunday School class in the basement of St. Paul's Charlottesville. We boys met in the furnace room - right next to that loud boiler. Girls incidentally met upstairs in the library. (I favor co-education!) Our teacher was Dr. Finger, an important authority to third grade boys. He was the UVA wrestling coach. Surely, we boys believed, that truth alone made him close to God.

Judgment Day was there depicted as a traumatic event. Our lives - it seemed - would be publicly reviewed from "The Book". All the bad things each of us had ever done would be read out loud while the gathered heavenly hosts would follow offenses with "Ooohs" and "Ahhs". Looking back, I suspect Hell took on dramatic reality for us down there in the furnace room.

Well the "Good News" of the Gospel eventually emerged as my biblical education progressed. A very different picture appears for us here.

Note the first thing the King does in the Gospel is to turn to welcome those sheep on his right: **"Come you blessed of my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of time."** These sheep can't believe it.

"Wait What? - Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty? - when did we not know you? ... and when were you ever naked, sick or in prison? - and YOU think we came?"

They have just inherited their eternal salvation - and they don't even know when it was that they earned it! The reason is clear: they did all these things unselfconsciously! They were not striving for salvation.

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these ..., you did for me.’”

They were acting out of their natural concern for fellow people - those whom the King had called their “bothers and sisters”. They were simply responding as **individuals in relationship** ... because they cared. They just cared!

And what about the goats? (We’re here too.) They also had been acting unselfconsciously - with no idea of creating eternal misery for themselves. In fact they probably were pretty good at staying out of other people’s business - primarily because they really didn’t care that much about other people - OR their business.

Now an interesting picture emerges from this Gospel: “**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.**” Note the verb here in the Gospel is in the future tense.

“When the Son of Man comes, THEN he will sit on the throne of his glory.”

The Son of Man, Christ the King, is depicted as not now being on the throne. One reason is He’s is right here - in and with the least of us. He is with us. We refer to God’s involvement with us as the presence and work of the Holy Spirit ... “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is with us now ... all of us ... even “the least of these”. Maybe God is sitting next to you at the moment! (When we get to the “Passing of the Peace”, be ready! You might just score big time this morning.)

You see Eternal Salvation - as given to us here in the Gospel - is far less confusing than we sometimes try to make it. Fundamentally - it is in claiming a caring relationship with each other. I believe that’s really what most of us delight in doing - when not afraid of being judged ... by a “severe King” - or by one another ... or ourselves.

Last Sunday I had the good fortune - in a neighboring parish - to run into a delightful lady while Passing the Peace. She had a pronounced southern accent and commented on mine. Later she revealed in conversation that she was a cousin of Harper Lee - the author of “To Kill A Mockingbird”. I

had mentioned the book in my sermon. She observed something. **In that book, the grace of trust and respect between characters results through honest relationship - Atticus Finch** with his two children, **Jem & Scout** ... but that same trust and respect is blocked by the absence of a relationship with emotionally disturbed **Boo Radley** and the black victim, **Tom Robinson** - two of the very "the least of these"- of that town. The cause of their alienation is **FEAR!** - so much then a part of the culture of **Maycomb, Alabama**. So too perhaps the culture of your life and mine.

Jesus Christ calmly walks through such cultural barriers in his life here on earth. He defies social expectation to affirm a Canaanite woman's faith, to counter the spiritual limitations of Nicodemus, and to open a healing conversation with the woman-at-the-well. He so consistently escorts us through our fears of one another - to show us God's way and truth and life - here in this world.

My new southern friend last Sunday reminded me of a woman I once knew - a Presbyterian, no less. She taught her children - and then her grandchildren - about such possibilities as Jesus demonstrated for us. She used to say, "**The Lord is your best friend. When confused or lonely, take it first to the Lord - and wait.**".

After she had to give up driving, she used to entertained her small grandsons by taking them on bus rides from one end of town to the other. Those rides were great adventures - primarily because she greeted everyone who got on the bus. She knew most of the people in town, it seemed, and made sure they all knew Elmer Sprouse, the bus driver on that route. You see - for us it all became a natural part of God's gift of life. I was eight years old when Gram died, and she's still a dominant influence in my life.

Caring about one another - even the least of these - here and now - can be a great adventure ... and likely, the entrance into companionship with Jesus Christ, the King.