

Today is Christ the King Sunday.

When I stop and pause and think What is a king? what does a King do? what comes to mind instantaneously is not a man who sits on a throne or carries a sword or who has a million man army

What comes to my mind is a dark-haired blue-eyed man who had double jointed hips and a lip that curled up when he sang or talked.

The King of Rock and Roll who is my personal favorite was known worldwide for his musical talents and his Casanova like charm and charisma.

What many may not know about him was his insatiable appetite for the world's religions.

He was an avid reader and although no one can accurately tie him down to one specific denomination.

I have found through a lifetimes worth of research the "King's" true faith was a personalized mix of Judaism, Hinduism, Mind Control, Positive Thinking, Numerology and Christianity.

And while this worked well for him. I want to be clear that as Lutherans we certainly can be open to other religions. We can be understanding and see where the pieces of other religions may be relatable. However, we are Jesus centered and focus on the Gospel the good news, God's Grace and faith active in love.

One of Elvis's most prized possessions was a book called "The Prophet"

The prophet is a collection of spiritual, philosophical, and poetic essays.

I was fortunate enough to see Elvis's own personal copy on display when I visited Graceland nine years ago.

In this book he often wrote his thoughts and feelings in all the blank space along the margins or at the bottom of the pages.

I found one footnote particularly striking to me: In Elvis Presley's own personal handwriting that I read with my own eyeballs.

And forgive me because I get a bit giddy remembering this were his own personal thoughts that said:

You have within yourself all possibilities to unlock all the answers that plague ones inner heart. God will give you the knowledge if you only seek it.

So, what do Elvis's words mean?

How does this have any relevance to us today a bunch of Lutherans gathered together in Schuylkill Haven Pennsylvania on this Christ the Kings Sunday?

Well hopefully I can connect the dots for you a little later in the sermon.

Many people may think that Christ the king Sunday is a long-standing festival of the church but actually its fairly new.

Christ the King Sunday was established in 1925 by Pope Pius the 11<sup>th</sup>.

He wanted to counter the destructive forces of the modern world, the rise of communism in Russia, secularism in the west and the Nazism soon to reign over Germany.

Not clear whether this was intentional or just a coincidence the festival landed on the last Sunday in October which coincided with the Protestant celebration of the reformation.

Eventually the Festival was moved to the last Sunday in the church year which then brought new meaning to the festival.

now Christ the King Sunday is used to proclaim that Christ should be the center of humankind, the joy of all hearts and the fulfillment of all aspirations.

In today's gospel reading from Matthew Jesus talks to his disciples and explains to them that when the son of God comes , he will come in all his glory he will have power over all his enemies and he will be coming with backup and be bringing all his angels .

He will sit on a throne and all the nations will gather before him.

He will be coming not only as a witness but as the worlds judge.

This is a somewhat scary scene to think about because when Jesus speaks of this he never says when or even where this is going to take place.

But I think the point of this is not to have us curious as to when or where this is going to happen.

The point is that the last word to be had will be that of Jesus, who just like a refugee once had no place to lay his head,

who just like a prisoner experienced hatred and mocking and unspeakable abuse to his own body.

A wanderer and an innocent victim he will be given all the authority on earth and in heaven and he will sit as the one true judge.

He will separate the nations just as a shepherd separates sheep and goats.

And he will place the sheep at his right hand and goats to the left.

The lowly man who spoke, on his way to his own crucifixion who sat unnoticed and unknown and lonely on the Mount of Olives will in the end be the universal King and HE will invite those at his right hand to inherit the kingdom.

So, if the sheep are at the right hand and they get to inherit the kingdom.

I want to be a sheep! how do I become a sheep?

What if I in the end am actually just a goat?

This is some scary stuff.

However, I can take comfort in the Grace of Jesus. Because even when I fall short, I am still worthy of Jesus's love and forgiveness.

This scariness reminds me of what Elvis said when he mentions about the answers, we seek that plague our inner hearts.

Elvis tells us in a subtle way that the answers are right here.

God is giving us the knowledge we just need to see it and be open to it.

In this gospel reading Jesus goes on to explain the answers.

Who are the blessed? And why do they receive this gift of the kingdom?

The answer is in six very clear very simple sentences:

I was hungry and you gave me food

I was thirsty and you gave me drink

I was a stranger and you welcomed me

I was naked and you clothed me

I was sick and you visited me

I was in prison and you came to me

Again, the question rings WHEN? The righteous ask Jesus When did we do these things?

They say 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?' <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we

saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.’

But there is a flip side to this coin because Jesus then talks to those on his left hand you know “the goats”

<sup>41</sup>Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,

<sup>43</sup>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.’

This is very confusing because they are thinking WHAT? When was THIS? surely if we knew it was you Jesus, we would have done ALL these things.

But Jesus explains that when he says:

‘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.’ <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

I feel the beauty of this gospel reading is in the distinct way that Jesus is telling everyone to treat everyone you come across as if they were Jesus himself.

He does not speak of pearly gates and high honors being bestowed upon those who are gifted speakers or prophets or teachers.

There is no mention about whoever gives the most money or has the highest paying job gets to inherit his kingdom.

Whoever has the most college credits or has the best hobbies or is the thinnest or best looking gets the prize. Jesus never says she who has the most twitter followers or likes on facebook will get a one way ticket to party with big man.

Jesus identifies with the worlds outcasts because he was an outcast he was betrayed, arrested tortured and executed.

Jesus stands directly, deliberately, and voluntarily in the shoes of the weak,  
the hated,

the mocked

the powerless and the tortured.

Because he was once one in the same.

A refugee who was a condemned criminal.

He gave his blood for them and for all of us.

And it can be easy to interpret this reading as a checklist to mark off that guarantees that you make it to heaven. But that is also not the case. Jesus is simply telling us to serve others. He is simply saying faith is active in Love. And that God's grace fills up the cracks in our hearts and around our broken edges and tells us that when we don't get it right, we are forgiven because he paid the ultimate price in his blood. And this love and grace he bestows upon us should be given to others just as he give it us.

So, my challenge to you is be a sheep.

Not in the sense where you follow the crowd and turn into what people now a day's call sheeple.

Do the exact opposite

Treat everyone who you come across "AS IF".

Treat them AS IF you were face to face with Jesus himself.

Feed them when they are hungry,  
if they are thirsty give them a drink,  
if they are a stranger welcome them,  
if they are naked give them clothing

If they are sick visit them

And if they are in prison come to them.

Even if its uncomfortable, even if its not what everyone else is doing,

Even if it is hard and it hurts

treat as many people as you can in every way possible "As If"

because we must remember that Jesus is the one who separates, He is the who judges. Jesus is the Judge.

Throughout time and especially in the world today we are all too eager to Judge one another.

Leave the Judging to Jesus and go out and serve others.

AMEN