

Nov. 19/20, 2011

Covenant, Stoughton

## A NEW KIND OF KING

Christ the King weekend/Sunday. I think of this weekend/Sunday as the New Year's Eve of the church year. Next weekend/Sunday, Advent begins a new church year.

How do you observe the end of a year, the anticipation of a new one? (pause to listen...) I sense that many of us review the year: What goals did I reach? What brought me joy? What caused pain? What would I change if I could do a "do over"? How did my relationships in my family change? How did my relationship with God grow or how did I grow more distant?

Jesus may have been doing a life-review when he told the parable we heard. Right after this parable Matthew writes this: *When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."* (Matthew 26:1-2) Jesus knows his life will soon end, and Matthew shares three chapters of sayings of Jesus that focus on the end...on persecution, on remaining faithful, on waiting in readiness, on managing the gifts God entrusts to us, and today on the great judgment. Throughout all these sayings Jesus points to the one who has come, is coming, and will come again, the God who creates us and gifts us, the God who meets us in the most unexpected places and people.

Where do you look for God? We live in a day when more and more people look many places for God, or don't look at all. I grew up in a small community with three Christian churches. I knew a car dealer who was Jewish. I knew no Muslims. No one said openly that they did not believe in God or could not know God. But in the past 50 years much has changed. We can no longer assume that our neighbors follow Jesus, much less belong to a church.

We who belong to a church have heard the message that God has entered our lives by choice because of God's love for us, has come among us in Jesus so we can know the depth of God's love for us, a love so strong that Jesus will die rather than quit loving. When we hear that great news spoken to us in baptism, in scripture, in person-to-person witness, at this table of Holy Communion, then God's Spirit calls us to follow Jesus and shapes us to live for others as he did. Every morning when we wake up, we have opportunities to love and serve others merely because God has created them and put them in our lives. In family. At work. At school. In our neighborhood. Anywhere.

Sometimes we go new places to serve because we see the need and seek to share our gifts of time and energy and skill. Last year some of us went to Haiti in response to the earthquake. Last summer 30 youth and adults went to Houghton, MI, in response to people in poverty. Last week seven of us went to Nashville in response to flooding in May 2010. (start slide show of service/mission trip and comment briefly)

We made our mark, not for the sake of gaining notice or earning points with God. We went because God loves us and all people and wants us all to care for one another. We went without asking if the people we would serve looked like us or believed like us. We went because God has rooted us in God's love; we bore the fruit of that love as we served others, just as you bore the fruit of that love last week, too, as you served others right here. In family. At work. At school. In our neighborhood. Anywhere.

I have come to realize that Christ the King broke the mold of what we expect of a king. Jesus himself said, *"...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give my life a ransom for many."* This Jesus, St. Paul wrote, *"...though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness."* (Philippians 2:6-7) Jesus broke the mold...a King who serves, a King who becomes a slave to serve others to show us the divine image in which God created us.

So that brings us back to the parable of the great judgment. The king welcomes into his presence those who served, who saw a need and responded merely because they saw another person in need and they had resources to share. They had no idea that as they served others they served the king, the king present in those in need...the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned.

Now and here Christ the King comes to us in a way we never would have designed. Now and here at this table, in a bit of bread and a sip of the juice of the vine, Christ the King welcomes us, forgives us in love, and free us to love. Amazing! Alleluia!