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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church  
Last Sunday after Pentecost/Feast of Christ the King/Year A  
November 26, 2017  
Text: Matthew 25:31-46

### “Seeing Him”

Today the Church celebrates the last Sunday after Pentecost and the liturgical year. It is also known as the Feast of Christ the King. Today's readings conjure up images that many of us have grown up with: a regal yet stern looking Jesus seated upon his throne surrounded by angels and archangels and a cloud of witnesses. There is the image of the Christ lifted high upon the cross-the cross being the instrument of both death and glory. Then there are the images of sheep and goats, of human beings, being relegated to their places on the Day of Judgment.

I grew up with these images and others that sometimes left me to wonder what that Day might look like. Will it look anything like the paintings by Michelangelo or Fra Angelico or Bosch? Like our bulletin cover? Will there really be a judgment where people are welcomed into eternal bliss while others shake with fear and trembling as they descend to a place of eternal damnation? And where will I land, on the right or on the left? Will I be a sheep or a goat?

I don't know about you but I don't find these images comforting and neither is the gospel if it is read in the same light because I/we may be just a little fearful of the unknown, we do not like to be judged, and on any given day we might be both sheep AND goat. As usual, Jesus gets our attention as he has done the last several weeks in Matthew's gospel in order to help us focus on kingdom living in the here and now. To help us focus and live in joy-filled readiness so that eternal life is ours when our earthly journeys are over or if Jesus happens to come again within our lifetime in great “glory to judge the living and the dead” as we say in our creeds.

Or maybe this gospel is for us to hear Jesus' words as a reminder that we never know when we will encounter him in our everyday living.

I can't remember if I told you this story before. If I did, let's go with it anyway.

Her name was Mary Ellen. She was a sophomore and I, a freshman at St. Mark's High. Mary Ellen was far from being the most popular girl in her class. She was heavy set, wore thick black glasses, and her dark body and facial hair were quite noticeable. We wore uniforms at this all girls' high school and Mary Ellen was made the brunt of many side comments and jokes as her white blouses never had that Tide sparkling clean look nor did it appear that her pleated wool skirt got ironed either. She almost always sat by herself at lunch and rarely did I see anyone actually walk with her in the hallways. I actually remember being told, "Oh Renee, don't talk to Mary Ellen! She's so weird!" Yet, I knew better to listen to that. That was not how my parents taught us at home. Mom always taught us to give ourselves time to know someone for ourselves and not to always listen to what other people said about somebody else. It also helped remembering something that one of the nun's taught us in religion classes early on in grade school, something that continues to stick with me to this day. And that is: you never know when you will see the face of Jesus in someone else.

In Mary Ellen I didn't see one to feel sorry for or pitied or to be further picked on or ignored but I saw someone who I was supposed to respect and embrace as a friend. And after getting to know her, I found Mary Ellen to be one of the sweetest, wittiest, and smartest persons I've ever known in my entire life. In her face I saw the face of Jesus. Sadly, she died after having been involved in a car accident in the late 70's. But I still think of her sometimes just as I have this week.

The purpose in telling you this story is not to show you what a great person I am because the truth is, I don't always get it right. There are times that I have failed miserably seeing Jesus in another human being so I am grateful for today's gospel that again reminds me, reminds us, to see Christ in others because we never know when or where or how we will encounter him. And we will encounter him.

We will encounter him in the 'least of these'-in people who are hungry and thirsty. In people who are strangers and in those who are naked. In people who are sick and imprisoned. We will encounter him in those who are being crushed by systems and shut out because of what they look like or because of who they love. We will encounter him in the abused and neglected. In the individual who begs for coins near highway exits, outside parking garages at Busch Stadium or who walk up and down the streets here in Florissant. In the woman who turns to Magdalene House because she cannot endure one more moment of abuse or she knows that she must get off of drugs and/or alcohol and turn her life around or she won't have many more tomorrows. We will encounter him in the teenager with the sagging

pants who asks for a quarter so that he or she can catch a bus home. In the person who pays a kindness forward. In the person seated near you.

Sisters and brothers, we are apt to finding Jesus anywhere and everywhere along this highway of life. And on this Christ the King Sunday, a choice is put before us. For on that Judgment Day Jesus says we will be held accountable. There will be consequences for the things we have done and the things we have left undone.

What Jesus asks of us is not hard. The acts of feeding and clothing and visiting, taking time to make a call or send a note, showing compassion and respect, of being in relationship with others, among other things, are not difficult. These are what Mother Teresa called “small things with great love.” He is not telling us that we need to be saviors of the world. There is already ONE Savior and he is Christ the King.

Jesus makes it clear. At the end of time, Jesus won't judge us based on our educations, positions and titles, or whether we were Episcopalian, Lutheran or Catholic or members of any other denomination, or how well we did in the stock market. But on how we lived our lives loving and caring for one another because in doing so we loved and cared for him.

So open your eyes and see him in all those you encounter today and in all the tomorrows you are given. For the King is here and is coming again soon.

Amen.