

Christ the King Sunday
November 26, 2017
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

The Light that is You

In Ezekiel this morning tells us, God will seek out His sheep, and remove the clouds and darkness that have scattered the sheep. It is easy enough to see us as the sheep, God will seek us out, and God will feed us. But I had to ask, what the clouds and darkness are that have scattered us. Perhaps we ask ourselves, What are the barriers that keep us from trusting God, following God's commands, and loving one another?

The Psalm encourages us to sing, and give thanks and praise, for God is King and ruler of all, and we are God's people. We understand that God is the creator of everything, and that we are God's people.

Finally, the Gospel tells us about the end of days, of separating the flock, of reward and punishment, and that we shall be separated into groups of those who followed God's command to love, and those who did not. The reward given was not for achieving academic or business success, or even for converting the most followers. The reward was given to those, who loved each other the most. Those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, welcomed the stranger, gave shelter to the homeless, and helped those sick and imprisoned.

The news this week offered an example of someone who had little, caring for a stranger: A Homeless man named Johnny helped motorist Kate McClure who was out of gas and stranded on 95 near Philadelphia. Johnny walked to a gas station, and with his last \$20, bought her back gas. Johnny's payback from Kate went far beyond the \$20. She started a GoFundMe account that has raised over \$300K and growing. Johnny had an awareness of Kate's plight, he had empathy for her bad luck, and he took action to help, to the point of using his last resource. He showed unconditional love for a stranger. A quote from the article, "*Johnny said, 'Yeah, tell me about bad luck. But don't get me wrong. I'm here (homeless) because of my own decisions. I got nobody to blame but myself.' But seeing a woman in need at 11 p.m. on a darkened exit ramp last month, he made a good and kind decision that changed his life.*"* Johnny said of the huge sum of money, that he will take what he needs, and give away the rest – he will not keep it all, he will let go of some of it.

Johnny gave the one thing he had to give aside from his last \$20 – his love and compassion for a stranger. This is the message of the Gospel.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, and we remember that Jesus is King of all creation -- everything. The Collect reminds us of this "...God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords." OK, does anyone else have Handel's Messiah playing in their head now? J

The Collect continues mirroring the Gospel, "*Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed...'*" I want to be blessed. Does anyone else want to be blessed, and not accursed? The challenge is to figure out how to do that.

God speaks to me in unexpected ways. I have a library of Gospel commentaries at my fingertips, but I found enlightenment on the scriptures instead, in a FB quote. "*Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.*"**

I read this on Thanksgiving morning, drinking coffee and having some quiet time before the feast and celebration. I read the quote aloud, and Sylvia immediately said, "That's hard!" "What's hard?" I asked. "Unconditional love" she said. It is hard to love people, it is easy to say, but difficult thing to actually do. I had to ponder that for a moment and then I realized that she is right, and that unconditional love, and sometimes just loving others, even a little, is not an easy thing to do. Do, that is the keyword, things are Easy to say, but hard to do. We need to be reminded to love, when cut off in traffic, in the slow line of the store, or when one more thing gets piled on your workload, when the news and social media flood us with stories of

people acting selfishly and bullying—remind us then to love unconditionally, intentionally, and extravagantly. Paul’s letter asks that we be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation that we may be enlightened—and we are going to need that if we are going to take action.

Like Johnny, the Gospel is calling for a three-step process: awareness, empathy, and action. Too often, I think we respond to the needs of others with only two-steps—awareness and empathy. We know people are in pain, hungry, and homeless. We acknowledge there is a problem, we see their point of view, and we are sensitive to their feelings and experience. We tell them we are sorry, or we post a sad face online. And then...we move on. “The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.” The world is waiting, what’s the hold up? What are the clouds and darkness that have scattered us? What are the barriers that keep us from loving one another?

I see my clouds and darkness in the thousands of pieces of information we are exposed to daily. There is a mass of garbage in the ocean, people need food in Africa, Central America, Detroit, next door. Schools are failing, bans on mining and oil drilling are being lifted, and animals and the environment are in crisis. The polar ice caps are melting, there are floods, and huge storms raining fire and water. Earthquakes, abused animals, the elderly, the poor, the homeless, and nuclear war looms large in our minds—it is EXHAUSTING and overwhelming. We are painfully aware of the needs, and for the most part we have empathy for all of it. But we are overwhelmed by the enormity of the problems. We are called to take care of each other as if we were caring for Jesus Himself. When I am overwhelmed by a problem, I often do not know where to start, and I/we end up doing a two-step on many problems, so we do nothing about most of it, and still end up exhausted from the experience.

I usually start with just one breath. Take breath, a moment to be still, clear your mind. *All shall be well.*

We all want to be in that number, counted as the blessed. Where do we start? Start by looking around you. Right now, in the moment, look around you, and become aware of the people here in this time and space. Realize first, that you are not alone. Loving each other is not the burden that overwhelms us. What overwhelms us is the fear of doing the wrong thing or not having enough for ourselves, that is the burden – let-it-go. Loosen your grip on your wants and needs—when you grip something so tightly, it ends up slipping out between your fingers anyway, so let go and grab onto each other. Together we will feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the poor, welcome the stranger, and comfort those who mourn. We may not solve the problems of the whole world, but we can start in our community.

Small, intentional steps—that is how I start, it is how we can all start. Be aware, hear the announcement about making sandwiches after the service and show up to help. Read the weekly communications and see what we as the Holy Cross branch of the Body of Christ are doing to help others—make the decision to join in and then do it. Remember to buy lunchmeat for next month’s sandwiches, bring food for the Red Wagon, help pack and deliver food and goods for CHO, Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets, and the Angel tree. Give to the Porridge Program, UTO, Pathways, and mission trips. Support fundraising efforts, and pledge to the mission and ministry of this parish—our parish. By focusing on where we are, and looking in our own back yard, we will find a treasure chest of opportunities to do everything the Gospel talks about—everything God asks of us.

Clearing away the clouds, and confusion and lighting the darkness—that is what lights the path to greater awareness, empathy and action. In the words of Capt. Jean Luke Piccard of the Starship Enterprise, “Engage!” Alone you cannot solve all the problems of the world, but I/you/we are not alone.

On Thanksgiving, Brene Brown wrote, “*To all of you who keep showing up in the midst of fear, uncertainty, and struggle – thank you. I’m deeply grateful for your vulnerability and courage. This is how we change the world.*”

*“Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.”** AMEN*

*<https://www.today.com/kindness/homeless-man-buys-stranded-woman-gas-last-20-here-s-t119251>

** FB quote from L. R. Knost: