

**Christ the King (Proper 29A):
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46**

This is a season of endings and beginnings. Payless was bustling on Thanksgiving morning with people picking up final groceries for the day. By Friday morning, cars were whizzing up and down 525 with Christmas trees strapped on top. Today marks the final Sunday of the church year, so this is a little like New Year's Eve here this morning—we're in the final countdown of days before the official ending of this liturgical year. Next Sunday, we'll be in Advent, starting a new year with a new color and a new gospel. So, today is our last hurrah with the Gospel of Matthew before we turn our attention to Mark. The seasons of the moon and tides and the seasons of the church, which typically follow their own rhythms, seem to be in sync this year. The full moon, known as the Beaver Moon peaks tonight at 1:13 a.m. and then the waning will begin. The Beaver Moon is a nod to this time of year when beavers end their work and head into their lodge for the winter. And just as the King tides up and down the Coast demonstrate the enduring power of the sea, this feast day of Christ the King is meant to demonstrate the enduring power of Christ.

Christ the King is a recent addition to the cycle of Sunday church feast days, instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 through an encyclical he issued as a way of stemming the rise of secularism and atheism. The full name of this feast day was proclaimed as the *Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, or Christ the King*. There had been wave after wave of political revolutions and global conflict and so the Pope's encyclical was intended to give hope and assurance after a long period of intense change. Until 1970, the feast was celebrated on the last Sunday in October, but then it was moved to the last Sunday in the liturgical year.

It's not just the ending of the liturgical year that we are in the midst of this morning and the ending of our year of making our way through Matthew, though. Within the gospel of Matthew, today marks an important ending, as well. After walking with the disciples, meeting and healing so many people, engaging in conversation after conversation, and telling parable after parable, Jesus paints this very visual description of the end times, the cosmological end, when the Kingdom is fully realized. It's his final sermon, if you will, before he begins to speak of his own ending, because immediately after this moment he tells his disciples that in just a couple of days "the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

This moment in Mathew's gospel, where Jesus's 'regular' daily life is ending and the crucifixion and resurrection are just about to begin is one of clarity. It's a crisis moment, or, more accurately, a *krisis* moment. The English and Greek words for crisis are related, but don't mean exactly the same thing. A crisis for us is typically an emergency situation where immediate action is required. In Greek, that is still all true, yet the emphasis is on the decision that must be made: the *krisis* is the moment when the decision must be made. That moment of coming to a fork in the road and the choice—one of great impact and consequence—stands before you. *Two roads diverged in a yellow wood and sorry I could not travel both*, as Robert Frost wrote.

Now, because this is the New Year's Eve of the church year, this is the last opportunity to look back at this past year with Matthew and reflect on the takeaways and learnings that we want to carry with us. (As students and teachers know, the academic year cannot end without reflection on the takeaways and learnings!) It turns out that Jesus, throughout Matthew, moves from *krisis* moment to *krisis* moment.

Story after story, parable after parable, encounter after encounter becomes a *krisis* moment, where Jesus shines a light on decisions that stand before those he is talking to—the crowd, the disciples, the religious leaders. But then, tucked into the gospel, are critical nuggets (the word *critical* shares the same root as *crisis* and means *discerning*) where Jesus gives very clear guidance on the ethical foundations of the universe on which the kingdom of heaven is built. One critical nugget comes early on in the gospel (chapter 7), after the Sermon on the Mount (not a nugget, but a mountain), where Jesus gives his version of the Golden Rule: “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” This is not the first articulation of the Golden Rule and it's not the last. As early as the 6th century BCE, Confucius writings said, “Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you.” The Greek historian Herodotus in the 5th century BCE said, “I will not myself do that which I consider to be blameworthy in my neighbor.” And there is the story about Rabbi Hillel, a revered contemporary of Jesus's. One day, a pagan approached the rabbi and promised him that he would convert to Judaism if the Rabbi could recite the entire Torah to him while standing on one leg. Rabbi Hillel is said to have replied, “What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.” (Retold by B. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction*, p. 140).

Another critical nugget comes later on (chapter 22), when he is asked by an expert in the law, “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus says, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” In other words, the law is to be obeyed to the fullest extent possible, but what really matters is responding in Love to others. (See B. Ehrman, p. 143)

So throughout this gospel, there is a consistent or insistent reminder to recognize that each day holds many *krisis* moments, when we are given the choice of how to respond. Matthew 25 alone (which has been the focus of the past three weeks) describes *krisis* moment after *krisis* moment, a story about a lot of bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom, followed by a story about workers receiving a bag of money and needing to decide what to do with it. And then today, we have the sheep and the goats, a story filled with little decisions and responses. Goats get a little bit of a bad rap here. The reality is that one minute we are sheep and the next minute goats; we are all a hybrid mix, choosing love at this moment, turning away in the next. Shoats and geeps, if you will.

But there is something even more pronounced in this final moment, this final exhortation before Jesus turns his attention to his last days. I think it isn't just a final reminder to try to choose the way of Love as often as possible. What we actually get in these final moments is an expansion of the Golden Rule, an even bigger picture than what's come before. Matthew 25 isn't just a description of what life looks like if you are treating others as you would have them treat you. Nor is it just a description of what life looks like if you are treating others as you imagine God wants you to treat them. Or trying to find the part of them that gives you a glimpse of God. (Sometimes, it is very hard to find that kernel.)

If we are truly meeting God when we meet the other, then what Jesus is talking about has something to do with putting the other at the center, so that I am constantly wondering: What do I have to learn from you? How best can I serve you? I know how I wish to be treated, but how do you wish to be treated? What does Love look like to you so that when I extend Love to you, it is done in a way that is meaningful for you. By the time we get to Matthew 25, the Golden Rule has grown into something even bigger and more beautiful and stronger—perhaps we might call it the Platinum Rule. Platinum is known for its durability. According to the Platinum Rule, Christ the King is not sitting in a castle far away, atop a bejeweled throne, trying to maintain order and calm in a world that is changing and full of strife. Christ is close, exactly where we least imagine, proclaiming that the only way through inevitable change and strife is compassion. If you were going to come up with a name for a Feast Day for this moment, this season, this time, what would you name this particular Sunday?