

Christ the King
Rev. Doug Floyd
Matthew 25:31-46

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'¹

The kingdom has come. The King reigns. His glory shines on earth as it is in heaven. Today we reflect on what we might call a present-future event. It is present in the sense that today is the day of salvation. In and through Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension, we have been taken up into the day of salvation. It is now. It is today. He is present even now. And yet, we still look toward the full unveiling of this promise in the hour and day to come.

Our Gospel today is not a parable. It is presented as an event. Yet, the Scripture is filled with symbolic images. For example, the separating of the sheep and the goats. We realize that when we read this, the image is pointing to humans. Our Gospel is drawing upon symbolic language from Ancient Israel.

If we look back to the Pentateuch, that is the first five books of the Bible, we find a series of commands about separating. Light is separated from darkness. In some sense, humans are separated from all the animals. Humans are created to bear the image and likeness of God and are given charge to care for creation. Humans are set apart as God's image and likeness in the world.

When humans turn from God, they fail to care for creation. They end up violating creation, violating animals and violating other humans. God sets apart a people to reveal His image and likeness. Thus, Israel is a holy people, separated from other tribes of humans. Israel is set apart to reveal God's glory and purposes.

Within Israel, those who serve in the Tabernacle and the tools they use in Tabernacle are also set apart. The priest is sanctified or made holy or set apart or separated unto service in the Tabernacle. We still follow this pattern when we confirm a person or ordain a deacon, a priest, or a Bishop. They are separated or set apart unto service.

We also set apart the table where we celebrate the Eucharist. This table is called an altar, and it is set apart to carry the elements of communion. It is not that the altar is endowed with special powers, but rather it is set apart for a specific purpose. We don't use the table for other purposes. We don't set toys upon the altar or drinks or anything else. It is set apart or separated for a specific use. In that sense, it is holy unto God.

When we hear the Biblical language of separating, we are hearing the act of judging and setting apart for a holy purpose. Jesus is set apart before the foundation of the world. He comes to

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 25:34.

reveals His Father in Heaven, He reveals and fulfills the call of Israel and simultaneously He reveals what it truly means to be human.

In our Gospel today, He “comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.”² He is sitting. The posture of sitting indicates certain things. When Jesus instructs, He sits. We know He sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. He sits as King and judge. This is the posture of ruling. As ruler, He instructs, intercedes, and judges. But he does something else that is vital for understanding our Gospel reading.

Isaiah 57:15 says, “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit...”³ Jesus the judge of all creation also dwells with the lowly. This is Philippians 2. The Son of God, the very God of very God, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”⁴

Jesus enters into the lowliest of the lowly. He will know hunger and thirst. He was a stranger, he was arrested. He was stripped and beaten. He entered into the sickness and death of all humanity. With the exception of John, His disciples abandoned Him. They couldn’t bear the depth of His humiliation. Of course, He would restore them and send them out to follow in His call. They would know hunger and thirst and weakness and suffering and eventually martyrdom. His church is founded in weakness.

With this in mind, we return to the Gospel passage. The King who sits in judgment is also the Son who entered into the life of the least of these. He raised up a family who follow Him in the way of Philippians 2. Paul writes,

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”⁵

We are His sheep, and we hear His voice. He calls us in different ways to live out the reality of emptying ourselves, taking the form of a servant, and laying down our life for others. This is the way sheep do because this is what their Father in heaven does.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 25:31.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 57:15.

⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Php 2:6–8.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Php 2:3–8.

But that gets it backward, so let me restate it. Our Father in Heaven loves with a self-emptying love. How do we know, because Jesus loves with a self-emptying love and He reveals the Father. Jesus intercedes for us that we might know the Father's love. He prays,

"O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."⁶

His love has been made known to us. He loves us with the Father's love. As children of the Father, we image our Father. We are separated, set apart to love with His love. We are set apart to fulfill and reveal the original call of God to humans: to bear His image and likeness; to care for His creation.

Notice in our Gospel story, the sheep and the goats are not aware of what they have done or failed to do. We are not keeping a chart of what we've done to make sure we end up as sheep. The reality is a sheep is a sheep and a goat is a goat. But the sheep hear the shepherd's voice. He draws them to Himself. He rescues them from sin and death. He loves them with an everlasting love. And in turn, they, we become lovers who pour out our lives to one another, who pour out our lives to the least of these.

The following story is told of St. Francis: "[St. Francis of Assisi](#) had a fear and abhorrence of lepers. One day, however, he met a man afflicted with leprosy while riding his horse near Assisi. Though the sight of the leper filled him with horror and disgust, Francis got off his horse and kissed the leper. Then the leper put out his hand, hoping to receive something. Out of compassion, Francis gave money to the leper.

But when Francis mounted his horse again and looked all around, he could not see the leper anywhere. It dawned on him that it was Jesus whom he had just kissed."⁷

G.K. Chesterton writes, "If St. Francis was like Christ, Christ was to that extent like St. Francis. And my present point is that it is really very enlightening to realise that Christ was like St. Francis. What I mean is this; that if men find certain riddles and hard sayings in the story of Galilee, and if they find the answers to those riddles in the story of Assisi, it really does show that a secret has been handed down in one religious tradition and no other. It shows that the casket that was locked in Palestine can be unlocked in Umbria; for the Church is the keeper of the keys.

Now in truth while it has always seemed natural to explain St. Francis in the light of Christ, it has not occurred to many people to explain Christ in the light of St. Francis.... St. Francis is the mirror of Christ rather as the moon is the mirror of the sun. The moon is much smaller than the sun, but it is also much nearer to us; and being less vivid it is more visible. Exactly in the same

⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 17:25–26.

⁷ Franciscan Media Blog < <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit-blog/st-francis-meets-the-leper/>>

sense St. Francis is nearer to us, and being a mere man like ourselves is in that sense more imaginable.”⁸

We are mirrors of the Most High. We are moons to the Son. In some sense, this story of the Son of Man coming with all His angels and sitting on the seat of judgment is made known now. Today. For today is the day of salvation. We the unworthy, unfaithful, enemies of God, have been grasped by Divine Love. The Son of God has separated us to Himself and loved us with an everlasting love. We are safe to love. We are safe to pour out our lives for those around us for Jesus has hold of us. Like little children learning to walk, we are learning to walk in the way of our Lord, our Shepherd. And He is loving His wounded, weak and contrite world through us.

⁸ James C. Howell, “Christ Was like St. Francis,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 89.