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THE TRUE ACT OF WORSHIP

As you would expect on CHRIST THE KING Sunday, we have a text that talks about CHRIST as KING, a parable about a king—the king who separates the sheep from the goats, the good from the bad, the saved from the lost.

- The passage, however, does much more than just describe JESUS as KING.
  - It pulls together several images of who JESUS is.
- Certainly, HE is our KING.
  - But HE is also the GOOD SHEPHERD who claims HIS flock.
- In verse 31, JESUS refers to HIMSELF as “the SON OF MAN.”
  - That title is used 81 times in the Gospels, but only by JESUS and only for HIMSELF.
  - Daniel speaks of the “SON OF MAN,” describing the ONE who comes with authority, glory, and power, who is the MESSIAH.
- So, in today’s gospel reading, JESUS is saying that HE is the divine judge who comes in human form.

HE is the CHRIST, the SAVIOR, the MESSIAH, the SHEPHERD, the KING.

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In this parable, JESUS is talking about the Day of Judgment when the KING will separate the saved from the unsaved.

- But JESUS is also saying that this separation will not be based on what we think it might be.
  - It is not a partitioning of the ones who do good and the ones who fail to do good. (I’ll say more about that.)
  - JESUS is teaching about the true act of worship,
    - and in doing so, HE is making a distinction between sin and response.

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Many people believe and, frankly, fear that judgment will be based on one’s own sin or lack thereof.

- Those who identify great sins in their own lives may have tremendous fear when they think about the final judgment.
- Many may be quick to point to the sin in others in the hopes that by comparison, their own sin may seem less.
  - They are like the child, caught with her hand in the cookie jar just before dinner who first confesses, “I did eat one cookie,”
    - but quickly looks to place greater blame elsewhere by saying, “but Tommy ate two!”
    - I may have sinned, but I’ll be glad to tell you whose sin is greater than mine.

Yet, the message of the Gospel is that sin has already been dealt with.

- The cross is the throne onto which the KING has climbed to announce that sin—all sin—is forgiven.

So, what is the basis for the KING’S judgment?

- How does the KING determine who sits on the right and who sits on the left?

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Salvation is based on faith alone.

- JESUS, though, is saying here that faith is not just a feeling or a decision.
  - Faith is a state of being that moves a person to a response.
  - Faith is responding to JESUS because of what we believe JESUS has done for us.
  - Faith is action based on trust in JESUS.

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James puts it this way: *What good is it if a person claims to have faith but no deeds?*

- *Can such faith save a person?*
  - *Suppose a brother or sister is without clothing and daily food.*
    - *If one of you says, "Go and be well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about that person's physical needs, what good is it?*
    - *In the very same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead.*
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A saving faith is real when it is put into action and it is best put into action by caring for the forgotten.

- JESUS says in this parable that faith in HIM should be directed toward what I'll call the Forgotten Six.

JESUS refers to the Forgotten Six as "the least."

- In the Greek, "the least" implies those smaller than the small;
  - not in stature, but in the eyes of the world.
- These are the ones in JESUS' day who were looked down upon;
  - judged as being unworthy and unloved by GOD.
- In our world, too, these are the ones who are easy to forget, or at least ignore, and often are condemned by some in the world.
  - The ones whom we seem satisfied to care for through programs.

But JESUS is talking, first and foremost, about ministering to them directly and in person.

- It begins with the needs of our neighborhood—the place where GOD has planted us.
    - That means looking around us:
      - What are the needs in our community?
      - Who are the forgotten that are around us?
      - And it means looking deeper than just the surface descriptions.
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The Forgotten Six that JESUS names give us a good way to evaluate the needs around us.

1) The HUNGRY are not just those who need food.

- There are many in our neighborhood who are hungry for purpose, for truth, or for greater meaning in their lives.

2) The THIRSTY are not just those who lack something to drink.

- They are the ones who crave meaningful relationships, or who desire just treatment for themselves or for others.

3) The STRANGER is not just someone who is in a foreign location or unknown situation.

- The stranger is anyone who seeks a place to belong.

4) The NAKED are not just those who lack clothing.

- They are the innocent, the unprotected, and the helpless.

5) The SICK are not just people with illnesses.

- They include anyone who struggles physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually.

6) The PRISONER is the most easily forgotten, even in a land with many prisons where we put those convicted of criminal activities.

- More than these, they are those who are prisoners in bad marriages or family situations, prisoners to addictions, or who are imprisoned because of financial obligations that are out of control.
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Serving the Forgotten Six, JESUS says, is an act of worship—true worship.

- Serving the forgotten is our true devotion to JESUS.
  - These are the ones for whom JESUS most purposefully came.
  - And they are the ones to whom JESUS sends us.
    - How we respond says something about our devotion to our KING.

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We may have difficulty understanding what it is to call JESUS KING.

- Our country broke away from the rulership of royalty.
    - In our country, we choose who our leaders will be.
  - But the relationship of a people to their king is a relationship of trust.
    - The people are devoted to the king because they trust their king to protect and care for their needs.
      - When the king is a good leader, the people virtually worship the king.
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This is our relationship with our KING as well.

- Our KING has provided for us and we put our trust in HIM.
- We worship our KING because of HIS goodness.

But our worship is to be so much more than what we are doing here right now.

- The worship our KING desires is for us to honor HIM by remembering those HE came to serve—the forgotten.
    - JESUS says in today's parable that this is true worship—service to the least.
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That doesn't mean that what we are doing right now isn't important.

- Just the opposite. Our worship in here, today, right now, is the opportunity for GOD to equip us for what our KING wants us to do out there.

Even our order of worship is designed to send us out to serve the forgotten.

- First, we present ourselves to the KING through the Greeting and the Prayer of the Day.
- Next, we receive from GOD in the lessons, the sermon, and the sacraments.
- Then, we respond to GOD with our hymns, prayers, the Creed, and offering.
  - Prayers of Intercession remind us of the forgotten to whom we are sent.
  - The Sacraments are shared as a community into which we are to bring the forgotten.
- Finally, we are sent, out there, to serve the KING by serving others.

We gather in here to be reminded of what we have received from GOD. (Inward; Vertical, from GOD to us.)

- Then we are reminded of those who can't or don't gather with us and are sent to minister to them and bring them in. (Outward; Horizontal, from us to them.)
  - We gather before GOD and then are sent out to care for others:
    - *"Beloved of GOD, go in peace to love and serve the LORD."*
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Serve the LORD by serving others.

Serve the LORD our KING by doing for the least.

Serve our KING by remembering the forgotten.

This is the true act of worship for CHRIST our KING, the ONE who comes for us *and* for the forgotten.