



SAINT JAMES'
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Fremont, California

SERMON

23. November, 2008. Christ The King Sunday
Title: "What Did You Do?"
Text: St. Matthew 25:31-46

J.J.

KID'S KORNER OUTLINE

- Happy New Year! Huh?? Not yet!
- Well, today is the end of the Church Year; next Sunday is Advent 1, the beginning of the new Church Year.
- The Church's Year doesn't follow the secular calendar . . . it's off by about 30 days.
- Instead, the Church Year follows the life story of Jesus, beginning with . . .
 1. Advent—when we will hear the stories about the preaching of John the Baptist, calling us to prepare the way of the Lord . . . and the announcement of the Angels about Jesus coming. It's time to get ready for Jesus birthday, which is . . .
 2. Christmas—when we will re-tell the stories of Jesus birth in Bethlehem, the manger and all the animals, the shepherds and the angels, and the coming of the wisemen – great stories! Then comes . . .
 3. Epiphany—when we remember all those times when he shows us that he was sent from God . . . the wonderful miracle stories . . . and finally the story of his Transfiguration. Then we go right into . . .
 4. The Lenten Season—which tells us the stories about Jesus final journey to Jerusalem, and then on to . . .
 5. Holy Week—the last Supper with his disciples, his suffering and death . . . followed by . . .
 6. Easter, and the Easter Season—Jesus resurrection from the dead and those wonderful 40 days following, until his ascension. And then comes . . .
 7. Pentecost—the coming of the Holy Spirit, the mighty wind and the tongues of fire, and then that long . . .
 8. Pentecost Season—in which we tell and re-tell all the great things that Jesus taught us. And it all comes to an end, today, which we call . . .
 9. Christ the King Sunday (which is today).
- Now for each of these seasons, there's a special color just to remind us of the season. I have asked Margaret from our Altar Guild to help me show you that. We hang special paraments or frontals on our lectern and sometimes on the altar, and each one has a special color:
 1. Advent—blue or purple
 2. Christmas—white or gold
 3. Epiphany—white, then turning to green
 4. Lent—purple
 5. Holy Week—usually red (with some variations)
 6. Easter—white or gold
 7. Pentecost—red
 8. Pentecost Season (ordinary time)—green
 9. Christ the King Sunday—white

S.D.G.



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As we come to the end of the Church Year, the Gospel readings become more and more difficult to hear. Two weeks ago we were warned to keep awake and alert because you do not know the day or the hour when the bridegroom shall return. Last Sunday was the "weeping and gnashing of teeth." And, today, we hear about the final judgment, the separation of the sheep from the goats, with the sentence upon those who are accursed: "depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Not exactly what you would call Good News.

Have you ever had to go to court and stand before a judge? Kind of scary, isn't it. It was for me. Some years ago, I was serving as the Interim Program Director at Enloe Medical Center in Chico, California. At the time, I was working for Horizon Health Corporation, and my task was to help the hospital re-establish its psychiatric services for the community. During that time, I was on pager 24/7, responding to any emergency that might arise. Now, Chico is an interesting city! Especially interesting is its speed limits: The main streets are all set at 35mph (or higher); the side streets are set at 25mph . . . and speed limit signs are posted far and few between.

One day, I had just left the hospital, when my pager went off. Now my staff was very good about paging me; they only called me when it was absolutely necessary . . . so when I heard the pager, I responded immediately . . . instead of calling on my cell phone, I simply made a "U-Turn" and quickly drove back to the hospital . . . well, maybe a little too quickly. As I pulled into my assigned parking place, the all too familiar blue lights were flashing behind me. I got out of my car and explained to the officer, a young woman recruit, that I had an emergency. She politely told me to go ahead with my emergency, and that she would wait for me. When I returned to my car a few minutes later, she handed me a speeding ticket. Well . . . I was miffed. After all, I had an emergency and thought she would cut me a little slack. She replied: "Sir, you were speeding . . . See you in court." Well, the court day came, and there I was, in a packed courtroom, sizing up the situation. . . and the judge. Now the judge was an older gentleman, about my age, and so I thought: "Surely, I can talk reason with him!" . . . And I began carefully to prepare my alibi. My turn finally came: "Will David Deppe approach the bench?" And I confidently stepped forward to present my case: who I was, and who I worked for, and to describe the emergency situation in which I had found myself. Well, the judge looked down at me, and asked me one question: "What did you do, Mr. Deppe?" What? I thought. That's not the question I want to hear. He should be asking me who I was and what I did for a living . . . and I would tell him that I was the Program Director for Enloe Medical Center (the most prestigious hospital in the area), and that I was responding to an emergency . . . hoping he would understand the importance of it all and be lenient with me. But that wasn't his question. "Perhaps you didn't understand. I will ask you one more time: 'What did you do?' . . . Mr. Deppe" "Well, uhhhh, your honor . . . I was, well, you know, uhhhh . . . I was speeding." Indeed! And what I had done was a violation of the law. I was declared guilty and fined. And I learned an important lesson that day: It's not who I am, but what I do.

I think that's what today's Gospel is all about. The Son of Man will come in all his glory to judge the nations of the world . . . and looking at the goats on his left, he will ask them: "What did you do?" What did you do for the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the starving, the imprisoned? What did you do for the elderly, the retarded, the handicapped, the sick? What did you do? And the goats, who were the Pharisees (as Matthew points) . . . the Pharisees who thought they were good models in their community (and in many ways they were) . . . the Pharisees respond: "Your honor, we are good people. If you get to know us, you will see we are not all that bad. We love our spouses, our children, our families. We have good beliefs and values. We go to church. We tithe (and surely some of that money goes to the poor). Your honor, we have positive feelings towards the needy and anytime we see pictures of starving people our hearts grieve." The Judge, however, responds: "Perhaps you didn't understand. I will ask you one more time: 'What did you do?'" . . . and the goats respond, "well, uhhh, you know, uhhh . . ." The Pharisees were hoping for leniency; they expected the Judge to be understanding . . . and they were amazed at the sentence: "depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

The sheep, on the other hand, when asked by the same Judge: "What did you do?" . . . The sheep respond with: "We didn't do anything." The Judge says, "Oh yes you did. I was watching you. You fed the hungry, you clothed the naked, you visited the sick and the imprisoned . . ." "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me . . . enter into eternal life."

Today's Gospel lays that question squarely at our feet . . . What did you do? I was hungry . . . I was thirsty . . . I was a stranger . . . I was naked . . . I was sick and in prison . . . What did you do? And the way we answer that question is very important. Of course, one may argue: "Hey, that's the wrong question?" or "That's not the question I was expecting?" You might even make the case that we are good people: We love our families, our spouses and our partners, our children and grandchildren. As Episcopalians we have good values and good beliefs. We have good feelings and a heart full of compassion for the poor" . . . But the Judge will hear nothing of that. He simply replies: "Perhaps you didn't understand. I will ask you one more time: 'What did you do?'"

And so we pray: Christ, our King, mercifully grant that we, who are often divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under your most gracious rule. Amen.

S.D.G.

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