

Matthew 25:31-46

Today is Christ the King Sunday, it is the day that has been chosen to highlight who Jesus is to us, and with today's gospel reading, what Jesus expects of us. Christ the King Sunday was added to the Church calendar after World War I ravaged the world. It was added to remind us that no matter what happens on earth Jesus is still in power.

We don't relate well with kings in our country since our country was founded on freeing us from English rule which was under King George III, and the parliament. Yet after the Revolutionary war we did become friendly once again. When we consider the rule of a king in most countries the king had total control of his country. This is how we consider Jesus as King. Jesus is not a greedy king as some human rulers have proven to be. Rather Jesus cares deeply for those under his sovereignty.

Our gospel reading from this morning shows that those who have followed him and have attempted to care for others as Jesus did are the ones who are blessed by Jesus' Father and will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The fact that these people weren't looking for Jesus when they served others is evident by the surprise of everyone who stood before Jesus and were separated into the right and the left hand side of Jesus.

Today I have three stories that demonstrate seeing Jesus in a modern day world. The first has a surprising ending about how one man was judged by a historian who wasn't well informed. The story as told by David Barber, a Lutheran pastor in Honolulu, was found in a newspaper article about those who fail. The focus of the article was centered on a historian who had written a book about people he called, "America's Born Losers."

In his research the author of this book came across an institution in the 19th century called the Mercantile Agency. This agency employed informants to file reports on the creditworthiness of their neighbors. According to the book's author, "It was like a 'national bureau of standards for judging winners and losers.'"

One such report was filed on a man named William Henry Brisbane. Brisbane was operating a business in Cincinnati, OH in the 1840s. An informant for the Mercantile Agency reported that Brisbane had failed in every occupation he had ever tried, including farming. The report also predicted that he would likely fail for the rest of his life. The biggest evidence for this conclusion was the fact that this "loser" had inherited \$100,000, which was a huge fortune in those days. Apparently Brisbane had spent most of this \$100,000 in a very short time.

But after the author of the newspaper article did better research, an entirely different story emerged. Actually, William Henry Brisbane had been a successful South Carolina plantation owner. The truth is that he had decided that slavery was wrong, sold his plantation and moved north. Then he felt guilty about selling his plantation including the slaves; if he truly thought slavery was wrong then he shouldn't leave his slaves enslaved. He used the \$100,000 he inherited to buy his slaves back and set them free. The Mercantile Agency may have labeled him a loser, but I suspect that God labeled William Henry Brisbane as an extraordinary winner.

The story of another man whom we may not think is a winner, but in God's eyes I believe he is, was shared in an e-mail magazine called HELP 4 SUNDAY.

A minister named Max works with the homeless and street people in the Ft. Lauderdale, FL area. Max became friends with a street person named Archie. Archie has severe gout in each foot and can barely walk. His livelihood is selling the Ft. Lauderdale paper out on the sidewalk whether he feels bad, sick, tired, whether it is rain or shine, Archie sells those papers. He lives in a little one-room apartment that rents by the day. He depends on the sales of each day's papers to pay the rent and pay for the food and utilities.

One day Max met Archie who was so excited he could hardly contain himself. He told Max that he just had to come and see his apartment; he had something to show him. Max was tentative about going

down the darkened area to Archie's apartment, but he knew it was something he had to do if he valued Archie's friendship.

They arrived at the apartment. Archie told Max that he had been saving money every day. He then threw open the door, held out his arms and said, "Look!" And there in this dingy, small one room apartment was a sofa, ripped and torn with all the stuffing coming out, but it belonged to Archie. There was a junky little black and white TV, with a bent coat hanger for an antenna, and there was even a recliner chair, all Archie's. It was evident that Archie would have had to save a long time to have anything that to him was "this nice." Archie looked at Max and said, "I have all I need now."

Can you imagine that? Suddenly, however, Max noticed that there stretched out in the recliner was a big ol' man--a friend of Archie's. Max recognized him as another street person. Archie didn't mention him, but as big as he was, it was hard not to notice him. "Archie, what is he doing here?" Max asked. And here is Archie's response: "He needs a place to stay. Now that I have all I need, don't you think I should share?"

One more story... told by Jim Roberts, a family therapist in Kansas City. Roberts was visiting the fourth-grade class of his son Daniel, where the teacher had organized "a balloon stomp." Each child had a balloon tied to his or her leg, and the object was to break everyone else's balloon without letting anyone break yours. As soon as somebody stomped you, you were "out," and the child who still had a balloon when everybody else's had been broken would be the winner; only one winner to the game. In a short while all the balloons were burst but one.

Then a remarkable thing happened. Another group of students, ones whom we term "mentally and developmentally challenged" was brought in. When told they were going to play the same game Roberts said, "I got a sinking feeling in my midsection. I wanted to spare these kids the pressure of a competitive brawl." He need not have worried.

At first, these children weren't sure how to play the game. After a few moments of confusion, a couple of them understood that the balloons were supposed to be stomped, and gradually it caught on. But as the game got underway, it was clear these kids had missed the concept of it. They didn't seem to mind that their balloons were broken. In fact, one girl carefully held her own balloon in place so that a boy could stomp it, and then he did the same for her. When all the balloons were gone, the entire class cheered in unison.

Think about what happened in that misunderstood game for a moment. In the original game only one child could win. In their version, everyone won! In normal balloon stomping the participants are momentarily alienated from one another (it's you against me), but as these children played it, the game was an occasion for camaraderie. Which version of the game do you think Jesus would prefer?

If you are sitting there thinking to yourself that this more cooperative approach to this game is somehow un-American, you need to know that business guru Edward Deming, the father of the Total Quality Movement which emphasized the benefits of collaboration, used a similar story to which he added this question: "Why does someone always have to lose?" That's a good question. Maybe we could learn something from these mentally and developmentally challenged boys and girls.

This is the day we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. We know there will come a time when Christ will reign over all. And he has already made it clear that when that day comes, everything as we know it will be turned on its head. Those who think they are winners will suddenly find that they are, in fact, losers. And those we so often label as losers will be at the front of the pack. It is because winners understand that God's plan for the world is what you learned in Sunday School long ago: loving and sharing; looking out for the weak and less fortunate. Living intentionally so that those who never have seen grace or heard of grace will find it in you.

All glory be to God.