**Nations to Care**

November 26, 2023 Reign of Christ

Matthew 25: 31-46 Russell Mitchell-Walker

This week myself and three other reps from the Warm Welcome Coalition met with the Minister of Social Services and his office staff to present the proposal for a warming centre at Carmichael Outreach and ask for funding. The needs were laid out with the proposal for staffing and operating the centre. The Minister was non-committal, asking what other funding sources we have tried, and in the end said he would take it to his ministry and get back to us asap. We emphasized the urgency of the need as we are in a houselessness crisis and we don’t want people to die on the streets from our cold winters. We need to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry and give something to drink to those who are thirsty.

This is what the passage in Matthew is reminding us of today – that God’s wants us all to do what we can to feed the hungry, give those who are thirsty something to drink, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and visit those who are sick and in prison. Indeed, when we care for others, regardless of who they are, we are caring for Jesus. It is about seeing the Christ, seeing God in everyone. The message when we look at the text is actually directed to nations. The word often translated to people, is more accurately translated as ‘them’. So, verse 32 would read: “All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” It is the nations that are being separated according to how they have treated the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, and imprisoned. This also fits with the context of the message of Jesus in Matthew which over the last few chapters has been focused on challenging the Empire and the systems of oppression that were a part of the Empire.

How are our nations doing with this? While we have many programs and funding to support organizations working with those in need, there is still much more that could be done. Municipally there have been more shelters supported and housing initiatives developed, but there is a stain on the council for refusing to fund ending houselessness last year, and for dismantling the tent city at City Hall. Provincially, while recent funding announcements for new shelters and housing sounds like a lot, it is a drop in the bucket in relation to the need. There has recently been an accusation that a motel used to house those in need, is owned by an MLA and they increase their rates for Social Services clients. The government has [rejected](https://www.ckom.com/2023/11/23/sask-party-votes-down-ndp-motion-calling-for-auditors-investigation-into-motel/) an auditors’ investigation. Federally we have a lack of affordable housing supports and recent announcements for more housing won’t take place until 2025. We could also point to inconsistencies in supporting Israel’s right to defend itself, and the legitimate concern for those killed and taken hostage in the Oct 7 Hamas attack, but they refuse to call for a ceasefire while over 14,000 Palestinians have been killed, including women and children. This does not allow the hungry and thirsty to be fed and given something to drink nor the stranger to be welcomed.

Today is what is called Christ the King Sunday or Reign of Christ Sunday. On one level many of us may be uncomfortable with the language and image of such a Sunday. However, when we look at it and understand Jesus, it is more about how Jesus is a different kind of king or leader, and promoted a different kind of kingdom, one that turns traditional understandings upside down. The tradition of this Sunday grew out of an increasing secularisation of the world. It is a Sunday that is a corrective to the abuse of power, the abuse of choices that nations and politics make between the elite and the poor, the wealthy and the poor. We could also see it as a corrective and reminder for the church as well, which has had a pretty horrific history of abuse of power over the years. This is quite evident for those of us participating in our Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Books study of Brian McLaren’s book, [Do I Stay Christian](https://www.amazon.ca/Do-Stay-Christian-Disappointed-Disillusioned/dp/1250262798/ref%3Dasc_df_1250262798/?tag=googleshopc0c-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=459552590532&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrand=4887156250740671002&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9001253&hvtargid=pla-1458415718638&psc=1&mcid=219aebceb2723ccb830520b219ee979f)? In the first part of the book, McLaren outlines the reasons one might not want to stay Christian or be involved in the church. A look at the titles of the first 10 chapters gives an indication:

1. Because Christianity Has Been Vicious to Its Mother (Anti-Semitism)

2. Because of Christianity’s Suppression of Dissent (Christian vs. Christian Violence)

3. Because of Christianity’s High Global Death Toll—and Life Toll (Crusader Colonialism)

4. Because of Christianity’s Loyal Company Men (Institutionalism)

5. Because of Christianity’s Real Master (Money)

6. Because of the White Christian Old Boys’ Network (White Patriarchy)

7. Because Christianity Is Stuck (Toxic Theology)

8. Because Christianity Is a Failed Religion (Lack of Transformation)

9. Because of Christianity’s Great Wall of Bias (Constricted Intellectualism)

10. Because Christianity Is a Sinking, Shrinking Ship of Wrinkling People (Demographics)

It’s pretty depressing reading and we are all looking forward to the next part of the book that presents the reasons for saying yes to staying Christian! It seems too often the church as an institution loses its vision of who Jesus is, how he lived and how he is calling us to live. If we could hold onto God’s vision of the kingdom of love and compassion, justice and generosity, grace and mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation, the church and the world would be a much gentler, kinder, fairer, and lifegiving place. We can see much of this in our lives and community, and catch glimpses of this kingdom. It is these glimpses of hope that can keep us going and offer encouragement that we are on the right path, that love is stronger than fear and hate.

The message of judgement in the passage is more of a reminder of the importance of how we live day to day, moment to moment, than a warning of end times. Jesus blesses those who hunger for justice and pursue peace, who are the salt of the earth. Judgement just brings out a reality that has been present all along. We are not even judged by who we are who or who we think we are but by how we live moment to moment. When we or nations are not caring for others, the judgement has already been received and seen. So let us live in the moment, caring for one another and those we don’t know. It is all about being Christian now, following Jesus and his example in our day to day lives. May we do so with glad and generous hearts, open to loving one another, and living with compassion and generosity toward others.

We pray that the Provincial government will do the right thing and support the warming centre, so we can live out our faith by caring for Jesus in the poor, the hungry and thirsty, and the stranger. May we do all we can to live out today, Jesus’ call to care for the vulnerable. May we support Christ the King, that turns our traditional understanding of the kingdom upside down. May we live for today, knowing that we are loved and love one another, including the stranger. Amen.