

Why? I think this is the single most common question I ask. I asked it as a young child because I wanted to understand. I asked it as a teenager because I wanted a way around whatever I was questioning. I ask it now because I simply cannot understand why we do what we do? Sometimes the answer is straightforward, like why is there so much traffic on 365 or 124 – we know the answer – there is a wreck on I-10. Sometimes the answer is only rhetorical – because I said so. Sometimes the answer is I don't know. Now you may be thinking to yourself that seldom is the answer I don't know – and sometimes that is true because we really do not know but other times we say it is the answer because investigating the real answer can make us uncomfortable.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday in our series on the Kingdom of God, as well as the last Sunday in our Liturgical Year. This Sunday is one of my favorites because I love the Gospel reading. I cannot remember when it took hold of my heart. But it did and it never let me go. The judgment of being sheep or goats, the judgment of the work of our faith is left entirely up to God, the judgments that we make daily come to the forefront. It's not that I like this uncomfortable teaching but it convicts me – all of us as we seek to be faithful disciples of Jesus.

This passage was difficult for the original audience as it remains difficult for us today. The genuine question from the righteous when they confront Jesus asking – when were you naked or hungry or thirsty and the pain that sinks in when Jesus says whenever you do it for the least of these, you did it for me. I do not know when in American Christianity was boiled down to “it's me and Jesus.” But I do know, without a doubt, that is antithetical to the Gospel. In Genesis Cain asks God if he is his brother's

keeper? Abraham questioning God about righteous in Sodom asking if there are 50, 40, 30, 20, 10 to spare the city? The disciples wanting Jesus to dismiss, the more than 5000 gathered to learn from Jesus, to find food for themselves and Jesus saying, you feed them. We are the children of God and as family we are to care for each other, especially the least of these.

This is not just caring for those that we like or those that have earned it – Jesus’ statement is that whenever we see someone suffering that is Jesus. There is simplicity in Jesus statement. We are not given a list of questions to ask before we help someone – Jesus did not have 30 steps but simply asked if someone was hungry, did we feed them? As we prepare to celebrate Thanksgiving and anticipate the bounty that will be on our tables we do a great job of giving thanks for all that we have but do we ask God how we should use what we have?

It has become far too easy to criticize people for what they do and do not do. It has been far too easy to put ourselves in Jesus’ position to judge whether another person is a sheep or a goat. It has been far too easy to believe that we have all the answers. Our Gospel reading today reminds us all that we do not get to make that judgment. The only judgment that God asks us to make: Is that person hungry? Is that person thirsty? Is that person a stranger? Is that person naked? Is that person sick? Is that person in prison? And if we answer yes to any of these questions then we are called, by God to meet that need.

The reason that I love this scripture so much is that it makes it easy to know what we are called to do as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We do not have to parse Greek or have an advanced degree to know what we are to do. The

hard part is actually in doing it. And yet, our Epistle reading from the book of Ephesians helps us with this. “¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.”

The hope to which we are called. The hope that the Apostle Paul is speaking to is not some simple platitude such as, this too shall pass. But it is in the hope of God Almighty that there will come a day when all the suffering in this world will be gone because it is on earth as it is in heaven – that the God of all time has called us to participate in that work, not because God needs us to do it but because we need to do it. We need to remember that we are not the be all and end all of the world. We need to remember that the world does not revolve around us. We need to remember why the feel good stories on the news tug at our hearts so. The image of God that we see in ourselves is also in each of our neighbors. When we can see Christ in each face we no longer focus on ourselves.

We need this reminder, not just once a year but all-of-the time. We need to ask the question of why people do what they do, not so we can judge their choices but so that we can begin to peel back the layers and see their heart. Perhaps you’ve seen the appearance of Christmas lights and decorations early this year or maybe even done so yourself. In years prior to this I’ve always been hard hearted and said why can’t we get through one holiday before jumping to the next. But I think 2020 is reminding us that we need

the light of Christ, not just in December but all year. As we close out the liturgical calendar of this year and move into a new year, our challenge is clear – are we feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting those in prison? Our call is to recognize Jesus Christ as our Lord and therefore we conform ourselves to God’s own calling. Our call is to live a life of the Gospel. Our world is in deep need of the love of God and the people of God to cease judging who is worthy and instead judging if we are feeding, welcoming, caring & visiting. May the hope that was in the Apostle Paul fill us so that we may live a faithful life of caring for the world. May we care less about the answer of why and be content in the answer Jesus gives because whenever you do it for the least of these you do it for me. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Am I my brother's keeper – 4:13

Abraham seeking to spare Sodom – if just 50 righteous, 40, 30, 20, 10 –
and then Abraham returned home

Feeding – 5000 – in the Gospel of Matthew – the Disciples are begging
Jesus to send them away so they can be fed and Jesus' response