

Matthew 25:31-46
Ezekiel 34:11-16

Seeing Through the Eyes of the Mystic – Christ the King Sunday

Rev. Edwina Landry – Nov. 22, 2020 – Trinity, Herkimer

Today is a special day. Today we contemplate on the in-between time between the end of one Church year and the beginning of a new with Advent next week. And so today we pause in the middle of these two events – past and present – in a feast day called Christ the King. You might wonder why ponder on the concept of a king during this time, since we don't live in a country that has a king, but perhaps that makes it even more important. It causes us to slow down and think what true leadership means. And slowing down is important during times of transition. In order to move ahead, we have to pause and really see where we are right now.

Where are we? Well, for one, we are all in the middle of a global pandemic that has changed everything. It's changed how we meet for worship. As we approach Advent we know that we will not be able to meet in person for those traditions that "make" Christmas for most people. It's changed our ability to interact in a physical way with one another. It's changed the way we work, and shop, and live. Everything has changed. And collectively, we need to take time to acknowledge, and feel, and grieve these losses. It may seem as though there is no stability. Our country is in transition between leaders and no one seems to be in charge – except perhaps this virus, or chaos, or people's rising frustrations, and anger. In between times can be so very disorienting, but they can also be times of incredible clarity if we take the time to really see.

Over the past several weeks, I've taken a short workshop on the life of mystics – in particular Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen – two amazing women mystics from the 16th century. A mystic is someone who seeks and believes in the attainment of a union with God. They seek not just to know God better, but to grow in wisdom, to see and experience God in a

profound way. Many have visions, or hear God's voice, or receive some other divine gift that illuminates their mind to see the Divine in a deeper way. A mystic is one who is open to a transformation of their consciousness to a deeper spiritual consciousness of the presence of God. Here is the surprise- it's not just reserved for only a select few. We all have the potential to be modern day mystics drawn to the very heart of God. This is what Jesus himself tried to show and explain to us. Jesus' whole purpose was to manifest – to reveal to us – God in the flesh. Through Jesus we could see God. And seeing through God's eyes – through the eyes of the mystic – we can see Jesus, we can see God, in one another. What once was hidden is revealed when seen through the eyes of faith, the eyes of the Divine.

This is the essence of Matthew 25. Whatever we do to and for each other, we do to Christ - and therefore God - because God lives within each of us. Hidden behind the face of the stranger, the outcast, the poor, the hungry, the prisoner, the person who gets under our skin, is the face of the Divine. If we want to follow Christ, live like Christ, be like Christ, we must *see* Christ hidden in the face of all people. God is hidden in the ordinary faces and the ordinary things of life, and we are called to see beyond the earthly into the eternal, to see the kingdom of God right here among us. This is the journey of the Christian, the journey of the mystic. And through the power of the Holy Spirit we are given the ability to do just that.

God has always been revealed in the hidden things of life if we look beyond just the surface. Water, bread, and wine when mixed with God's word reveal the very presence of God. David Lose, pastor and theologian says, "A promise of salvation attached to a command of Jesus involving a physical element and surprising us with God's unexpected presence. Sound familiar? Pretty much the hallmarks of the way we – particularly in the traditions stemming from Luther and other 16th-century Reformers – describe the sacraments."

During this time when many of us cannot receive the sacrament of Communion, we must remember that this real presence of Christ still resides within us. Grace has no expiration date. It does not go away. It's revealed in the face of our neighbor. It's revealed in the love we show toward each other, the sacrifices we make for each other – such as wearing masks and staying separated for yet a while longer for the sake of others. When we advocate for justice for those who can't speak for themselves, when we embrace the outcasts, when we comfort the afflicted, when we listen with deep concern, we are participating in sacramental acts that reveal the presence of God. This is what it means to live out the kingdom of God.

In this in between time before Advent begins, we pause today to see beyond the ordinary into the mystery of God who is our greatest ruler, our greatest shepherd – a near-eastern ancient word for king. This King spoke through Isaiah saying “I myself will search for my sheep. I will seek them out. I will rescue them. I will bring them out. I will feed them with justice.” This King was seen in Jesus, who showed us the very nature of God, and sacrificed everything so that we might truly live. This King is revealed every day when we show love and compassion and mercy toward each other, seeing the face of Christ in each person. This King is the one we can count on and cling to no matter what the storm or pandemic. Look beyond the ordinary and see the loving face of Almighty God all around you. Live in and from that Divine love. Amen.