

Christ the King Sunday St. Christopher's Episcopal Church

An old expression that floats in the ‘speech’ world is to introduce the material by telling the audience what you will say, then say it, then conclude by telling them what you just told them. Jesus must have known of that expression, because it seems that is what he is doing.

Today’s gospel is the final part of Jesus’ final discourse/speech to his disciples. Before church buildings, before tapestries, and silver and brass appointments, before Prayer Books, there was the word. While it might seem convoluted, in truth Jesus’ message was clear and direct. Once more he wanted to convey the heart of his message to them. In the end—when all else is said and done—there will be a reckoning of those who lived as kingdom people, and those who did not. Those who lived as kingdom people were known by several marks:

- Feeding the hungry
- Offering drink to the thirsty
- Welcoming the stranger;
- Clothing the naked
- Caring for the sick
- Visiting the imprisoned

In those simple actions, we were affirming the very being of God. For God is love, and each of these actions is about love. These actions are about stretching beyond self, confirming that we are all related, and sharing love with each other.

In our collect today, we pray, "...God, whose will it is to restore all things..." We like to restore things: old cars and boats; houses, furniture, and even clothing. What we really like to restore is "the way it was"—at least in our own minds. We want Sunday school to have 300 kids; our job to not be so performance-driven; it only rain after dark, and cars that don't go so darn fast. We want to go back to the time when life was simpler—there were less rules and regulations, milk didn't have to be pasteurized, and there were only three kinds of cereal to choose from. We especially want to restore the time when our image of the world reigned, and we were always right.

God's restoration does not align exactly with ours. God's image of restoration is like that which Jesus describes today—a world where neighbors feed the hungry and offer drink to the thirsty. Strangers are welcomed, and people reach out to touch those in prison, and sick, and we cloth the naked. Jesus reminds us that isn't a checklist for the week, and when we get done, whether Sunday evening or Tuesday morning, then we can take the rest of the week off. Rather, it's a way of life. A way of life that, quite frankly, often makes us uncomfortable with its direct appeal.

This kind of justice is not the natural outgrowth of the baptismal covenant, or the unspoken half of the creed—it is that which precedes creed. Being restorative in God's way is that which fosters creed. Often we forget that we may be the one who is sick, hungry, or thirsting—or in the words of Ezekiel, we may be the one who is lost, strayed, injured or weak, and in need of intervention.

A friend shared her story of a strange encounter this week. She and other church friends were in a local restaurant, and had placed their coats and bags in a certain part of the seating area as was their custom. As they were talking, a man came by, and shortly after, came by the other way, and then left the restaurant. One of the group noticed that he had taken a backpack of one of the kids, and went after him to get it. He apologized, saying it looked abandoned, then surrendered the bag. Soon after, he came back inside and sat back at his seat.

Upon its return, the group discussed how weird it was that this man came over and just took the backpack from what they considered their part of the restaurant. My friend then said she felt compelled to talk to the man, and ask why he did it. She was kinda miffed, but wanted him to know that wasn't acceptable. As she approached him, she realized she had no idea what she was going to say to this crazy man, so said a quick prayer on her way to his table. As she came to him, she let him know she was aware that he had taken the backpack, sat down at his table and said, "Are you ok?"

It turns out this 60-something year-old man was on a drug regimen, which his doctors were tinkering with. Part of his illness was to act impulsively, and he had difficulty overcoming that. There was no one at home to help him stay on his drugs. When asked if he had a church, he said that he had been encouraged to leave because of his illness, and began to cry.

God puts so much goodness in our hearts. We reach out again and again to those in need. We donate to the foodshelf, give to local or

international charity groups, and drop a dollar in the red kettle. Yet there seems to be more—more hunger, poverty, people who don't want to work, or expect a handout. And so we get donor fatigue. Or our hearts become tired of hearing the same pleas over and over. We see “those people” and we know what they want even before they ask. For God's sake there are now over 7 billion of us!

We forget how precious the gift of ourselves is. Surely, if you had asked Lord, I would have given to **you**. I would have brought **you** into my home and fed and clothed **you**. Restoration is not measured in our increments of goodness, meting out only so much a day. For we are to respond in turn as God has done for us—mercy upon mercy. Not because it is the right thing to do, or because we will get brownie points in heaven. But because that is what being made in the image of God is all about. God delights in all manner of beings—human and otherwise. And we have such a wealth from which to give to others. Scripture tells us that salvation is something we discover when we least expect it. It drops into our lives like the most beautiful snowflake, gentle and unadulterated.

We give because we are able. We give because we care enough to see the need. We give because we are delighted to not have crusty and rusty souls. We offer ourselves, because in the end, restoration is not ours to calibrate. The same welcome and embrace we have experienced is longed-for by countless others. It's Jesus' message—first, last and eternally. Thanks be to God.