

Christ the King *Monday*

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Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-40

I am deeply disturbed by the staggering reports of sexual harassment coming to light this fall, starting with the Harvey Weinstein affair. I'm also embarrassed by my naiveté. I had no idea sexual harassment of such grotesque dimensions and such flagrant violations were so rampant in certain sectors of our society, notably entertainment and politics.

But of all the shocking revelations, none has shaken me like the news that broke this week about Charlie Rose. Here a North Carolina native--one of our own--and someone whose work I have long admired, was outed as a sexual predator.

This news left me wondering, "Can anybody be trusted? Is anybody who we *think* they are? Who else among those I know and trust might be--to lift a line from Jesus--'a wolf in sheep's clothing?!"

So it is with some relief that I find us landing today at Christ the King Sunday. For the biblical texts on this Sunday, the last of the church year, proclaim that there are no shameful acts that will stay hidden and no public or private acts of abuse that will countenanced. For someday, the risen Christ will mete out justice to those who have used their power for devilish ends, while those who have been wounded and abused and shamed will find not only vindication, but healing.

In today's lesson from Ephesians, Paul pulls out all the stops in proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Christ, the risen and exalted one, cannot be contained by time or space. His triumph is complete and now all creation--and you and me--and all who have abused or exploited others, must give an accounting to the Crucified and Risen One.

Similarly, in Matthew's gospel, we encounter the familiar parable of the last judgement where Jesus separates the sheep from the goats. Only as Matthew presents this story, it is not so much a parable as an apocalyptic unveiling, a peeking behind the curtain separating time and eternity.

And yet, unlike Dorothy discovering that the mighty wizard of Oz is a pitiful phony, Matthew proclaims on Christ the King Sunday--as do we--that Jesus is the ultimate truth about what matters most. And what matters most is not our loud professions of public piety. No, what matters most is how we treat our neighbors, especially the most vulnerable and at risk among us.

Alan Patton wrote powerfully of the struggle for justice in South Africa. In his novel, *Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful*, he tells of a white school master who resigned because his school's football team was not allowed to play the team of a neighboring black school. Shortly thereafter, the school master was visited by Emmanuel Nene, a black leader eager to meet a white man willing to take such a stand.

As they shared about the struggles of their land, the white principal warned Mr. Nene that black leaders faced far greater dangers in opposing apartheid than did privileged whites like himself. Mr. Nene nodded in acknowledgment, but then went on to say, "I don't worry about my wounds. When I go up there, which is my intention, the Big Judge will say to me, 'Where are your wounds?' And if I say I haven't any, he will say, 'Was there nothing worth fighting for?'"

Jesus means "there are things worth fighting for." Like the inherent dignity and worth of every person as a child of God. And justice for the oppressed. And food and clothing and

decent housing for our neighbors who are doing without. In other words, if Jesus really is King of kings and Lord of lords, then all the values by which we would otherwise live--like countenancing sexual harassment with a wink and a nod, or attacking and demeaning women who finally found the courage to come forward and tell their anguished story--are no longer acceptable.

If Jesus really is King of kings and Lord of lords, then the worship of power and privilege that allows us to use and abuse our neighbors, rather than serve them, has to go. For now we answer to a new Master. And in his nail-scarred hands, everything we once took for granted is up for grabs.

Further, to hear Paul tell it, the church is that vitally important place and people where Christ's Lordship is given concrete, public expression. For the church is the body, the continuing enfleshment, the living embodiment of Jesus Christ. Thus, when the church is being the church, she cares about the things Jesus cares about, which is to say, she cares about the people Jesus cares about.

On Monday of this week, I got an email from a concerned member of our church. She had just learned that a family in her child's school was about to be homeless the very week of Thanksgiving.

Fortunately, the principal at this school, sprang into action. She sent out an email, like an SOS flare fired into a dark, desperate night, inviting all who could to help. Our KBC member made a personal gift, but she also reached out to her church for help. And because of your generosity as members of this fellowship, we were able to send funds through the school to help this needy family.

I was moved by the signature line on the principal's email. "There is a lot that happens around the world we cannot control. We cannot stop earthquakes, we cannot prevent droughts,

and we cannot prevent all conflict, but when we know where the hungry, the homeless and the sick exist, then we can help.” And this week, in a small way, we did.

That same Monday of Thanksgiving week, I learned of another person needing a safe place to stay. I referred him to Knollwood’s own, Corinne Causby, the new program director at City with Dwellings, a ministry striving to end homelessness in our community. After Corinne had interviewed this gentleman and vetted this need, Knollwood again stepped in to help.

And if you want a personal, hands on, real Jesus experience of helping the homeless, volunteer to help Knollwood staff the overflow shelter this winter. We do this in partnership with St. Timothy’s, where the shelter is housed, and we have agreed to provide meals, greeters, and overnight volunteers every Thursday night. You can read about how to help in your bulletin notes.

Or gather in the Glenn Oaks Neighborhood near Kimberley Park two weeks from today for the dedication of *two* new Habitat houses. These houses were built by a team of churches, a mosque, and a synagogue working together, which in and of itself, is a miracle of biblical proportions. Knollwood has significant financial and sweat equity in this project.

Here then is a single window on a week in the life of KBC, in this case, a window on our efforts to help the homeless or the nearly homeless: two benevolent gifts, a KBC member working to end homelessness, providing volunteers and meals to an overflow shelter, and offering funds and volunteers to complete yet another Habitat build.

Granted, there is more we can and should do, and other areas of need Jesus identifies: caring for the sick and imprisoned, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and welcoming the stranger.

But for me, it’s important to celebrate all the ways Knollwood is striving to create pockets of hope and healing in a sometimes sad, desperate world. Because that means we’re not all

talk and no action. No, we're trying to make sure that what matters most to Jesus, matters most to us.

And speaking personally, rather than congregationally, confessing Jesus as King means living as a person of integrity: one in whom there is a growing congruence between our inner and outer lives, our private and public selves. Not because we're trying to impress anybody, especially God. But because we long to be who we say we are: followers of Jesus, those in whom his life is growing and unfolding in surprising and wondrous ways.

A mother and her three-year-old daughter happened to see their minister at the grocery store. "Is that Jesus?" the little girl excitedly whispered.

Later, when the mother told the pastor of the little girl's question, he was moved by her innocent faith. So much so, that he wrote the child a letter that became a treasured keepsake:

"Your question haunts me. You are the first (person) who ever mistook me for him. Just imagine, in forty-three years no one has seen enough of Jesus in me to ask such a question as yours. And in a very short time, you won't ask it either. You'll know what a vast difference there is."

"And yet you are right. A person ought to be able to look at any member of the church and see a resemblance there to Jesus. Seeing the kindness of a Christian, one ought to be able to connect it with his kindness. Seeing the love a Christian has for all people, one ought to be reminded of an even greater love which Jesus has for everyone."

"Without realizing it, Carol, you have asked a question which leads to a great question all Christians must ask: `When people look at me, do they see anything that even remotely resembles Jesus?'"

What do people see when they look at me? What do they see when they look at you? Is there any quality of compassion or caring reminiscent of Christ? Any glimmer of the faith, hope,

and love that is the fruit of his Spirit? Is there anything about us that even remotely resembles Jesus?

If there is, then let us pray that he will make our lives more fruitful still. And if there is not, then with broken hearts, let us confess our failures and ask him to renew and remake us by his grace. For this is Christ the King Sunday. And we are called not just to believe in Jesus, but to follow him. And not just on Sundays, but on Mondays too.

Yes, the kingdom of God drawing near in Jesus changes everything. It changes the values by which we live and the metrics by which we judge success. It changes what we do in public and what we do in private. It changes the people we count as expendable--or mere playthings for our amusement--into the precious children of God they are. In short, the kingdom of God drawing near in Jesus changes us from people who live only for themselves into people who live for him.

At a dinner party, the guests were discussing the deplorable state of the schools. One man, a CEO, offered his own cynical analysis. "Let's face it. What's a kid going to learn from someone who decided his best option in life was to become a teacher? The old adage is true: 'Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach.' No wonder we don't pay those folks anything!"

There were chuckles all around.

Another guest, knowing a teacher was present, said to the woman seated across from him, "Susan, you're a teacher. What do you make of all this?"

Anger rising in her voice, Susan answered, "You want to know what *I make*? I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could. I make a C+ feel like a Congressional Medal of Honor for a kid who did his very best. I make kids sit through 40 minutes of study hall in absolute silence. I make parents tremble in fear when I call home."

"You want to know what I make? I make kids wonder. I make them question. I make them apologize and mean it. I make them write. I make them read, read, read."

"In music, I make them practice until they can play the music in their sleep. Then I make them walk on stage and bow a hundred times so the audience won't know their knees are knocking."

Glaring at the CEO, she continued. "I make kids understand that if you have the brains, then follow your heart. And if someone ever tries to judge you by what you make, you pay them no mind."

"You want to know what I make? I make a difference! What about you?"

At the end of the day, that's all that Jesus asks: that we use our lives to make a difference. Only not in the things that matter most to everybody else, but in the things that matter most to him.

O holy Christ, our King of kings and Lord of lords, help us rise to our confession by becoming a person and a church where what matters most to you, matters most to us. In your name we ask it of our loving heavenly Abba. Amen.

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