

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Matthew 25:31-46
Ezek. 34:11-16,20-24
Psalm 95:1-7a
Ephesians 1:15-23

November 22, 2020
Christ the King

I want to start this morning with a song that has a special place in my life. And, no, I am not going to sing it...so don't worry. Singing is not my God given gift and I'm OK with that.

Instead, we are going to let Amy Grant do the singing. The song I am going to play for you is *Thy Word*. It's a reflection on Psalm 119 and it's the words from this song that I want to guide my sermon this morning. Let's take a moment to listen and center our hearts on the Word of God.

You may listen to the song here on your own here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OTVuGaiTsE&list=RDCSZIIVP9u0Y&index=2>

Let me explain why we started with this particular song. Today is Christ the King Sunday...it's a day on our liturgical calendar that marks the end of Ordinary Time and acts as a transition into Advent. It's a chance to reflect...on where we have been and where we want to go. You might think of this Sunday as centering our focus on the coming of Christ so that we can be fully open to the Advent season, to recognize that a new way of being is about to emerge. It asks...what does it mean to truly proclaim Christ as King in our lives?

Our texts this morning give us a laundry list of examples of what it means to follow this new king. A list of things to do and ways to act. Such as...we should feed the hungry, provide clothing and shelter to those in need, extend kindness to strangers, help the sick and suffering, take care of those in prison. These are all well-worn directives that have become synonymous with what it means to follow Jesus. And, I love that about our texts. These are markers of what we consider to be a good Christian life. We all know what it is supposed to look like (at least I hope so!) But, I would argue that we can't jump into the to-do list effectively without first centering our hearts on the reason we do what we do as Christians.

There is an important step of preparation that I want us to consider this morning. A step of preparation that brings the heart of God to the forefront of these outward signs of faith.

You all know I grew up in the Baptist Church...Trinity Baptist in Seneca, South Carolina. I loved my church. We had youth leaders who inspired us. We had friends who encouraged us. We had a preacher who brought the Gospel alive for us as young people.

We didn't just learn about the do's and don'ts of our faith. We learned something that I think is even more critical. We learned how to put our lives into God's hands and to center everything we do on the heart of God. We learned what it means to give ourselves to Jesus Christ in word and in deed and in spirit. We learned the joy that comes from that kind of heart centered

commitment. And, it was that centering that made everything else possible, and not just possible but sustainable.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

These words were life changing for me when it came to learning about the heart of God. I remember we sang this song around camp fires, in youth choir, in worship. And, every time we sang this song we were reminded that our faith was first and foremost grounded in the beauty of God's Word and in God's love for us. We built our faith by letting those words light the way, to guide us through difficult times, to give purpose and meaning to our lives. As a young person, I believed and I still believe, that Jesus sheds light on my life in ways that I can count on. It's the one thing that is consistent when the world feels unsteady and confusing. Christ the King takes away darkness and uncertainty. Christ lights the way if we are willing to follow.

Jesus be my guide and hold me to your side. Nothing will I fear as long as you are near.

These words affirm that to walk the journey of faith, we have to believe that we are guided by something bigger than ourselves. We allow ourselves to be encouraged and taught so that we may have confidence in our decisions and actions. God's words become not just words in a sacred book but they become a life-giving source of strength and direction. I remember how much it helped me to sort through the messages I heard out in the world, the messages that were tempting and promised all kinds of satisfaction and reward. But, these were also the same messages that didn't hold up to the things I had learned in church. For me, Christ the King instilled in me conviction and courage. Christ builds a foundation if we are ready to grow.

I will not forget your love for me and yet my heart forever is wandering.

We are reminded that we will have moments that pull us away from God, moments where we will feel unable to be the person we know God wants us to be. We will have moments of doubt and frustration. We may even have moments where we don't feel worthy of God's love. But, Christ the King says that we are loved no matter what we may go through, no matter how far we may distance ourselves from faith, we are still worthy. Christ the King came into this world because we are so deeply loved even when we fall short of who God wants us to be. Christ walks with us and carries us if we get tired.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

So, let us proclaim that Christ is King. Let Christ light the way for us, encourage us, and love us. Put everything in God's hands. Fully committed, fully centered on Christ.

When we do that, the words of our Gospel start to take on new meaning. We look at the to-do list not as a long list of requirements but as a list of faithful, loving acts that flow out of our trust in Christ. Because when we believe that Christ has put immeasurable value on our lives, we can do no less than to place immeasurable value on other people's lives. It transforms our

character. It shifts our motivation. It grounds our actions and moves us to be ever mindful of who we have been and who we want to become.

Then, the lamp guiding our feet and lighting our path shows us how to feed the hungry, how to provide clothing and shelter to those in need, how to extend kindness to strangers, how to help the sick and suffering, and how to take care of those in prison. It is no longer a question of how we can help but where we can help. It is no longer a burden to do what our faith calls us to do but a freedom that comes only when our hearts are centered on Christ as our King.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Thanks be to God. Amen.