

Christ the King (A/RCL)  
Matthew 25.31-46  
November 20, 2005  
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

Show of hands: how many lefties do we have in the congregation today? Having a daughter who is a leftie has raised my consciousness about the challenges left-handed people face. You have to be careful where you sit at the table, so you're not constantly knocking elbows with the rightie to your left as you cut your meat ☺. You struggle with smearing the ink of what you've just written as drag your left hand over the paper. You can't write on the right half of a page in a three ring binder. You get a bum wrap. The nasty word "sinister" comes from the Latin word *sinistra*, meaning "left." It leaves us with the impression that lefties are somehow shady. In French, the word for "left" is *gauche*. It's cool to **visit** the *Rive Gauche*, the Left Bank (in Paris), but it's **uncool** to **be** "gauche," embarrassingly unsophisticated, country bumpkin-ish. If someone is correct, she's "right." If someone is wrong, he's in "left field." How unfair! And in today's Gospel, those who are **blessed** are at the **right** hand of the king. Those who are **accursed** are to his **left**. The bad P.R. that left-handed people have to put up with is just not "right"!

So who are the "goats" in this story, the accursed ones? They are the ones who "will go away into eternal punishment" (Matt. 25.46). We would say, they are those who will be damned, "thrown into the outer darkness where they will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," as we heard last week in the parable of the talents. Most of us like to believe we will end up as a sheep at the right hand of the King, when judgment time

comes. Let me tell you about someone, though, who was convinced **he** would end up as a **goat** at the king's **left** hand.

I don't know the man's name, but he shows up in a scene in the movie *Gandhi*, starring Ben Kingsley. It's toward the end of the film, when Gandhi is almost dead from fasting, trying to compel warring Hindus and Muslims in India to stop killing each other. Word has finally come that there is a cease-fire throughout the land. There is an unaccustomed silence hanging over Calcutta, replacing a couple weeks' worth of shooting and mayhem. Gandhi is almost comatose on his cot as two representatives of the Hindu and Muslim factions lay down their arms before him. A third wide-eyed, crazed looking Hindu man approaches him, holding a very threatening-looking machete. The audience's heart just about stops, as we wonder if this fellow is going to stab Gandhi.

He reaches into his breast pocket and draws out a piece of bread, which he flings onto Gandhi's stomach. He announces, "I'm going to hell anyway, but I don't want your death to be on my soul." In other words, we've stopped fighting, so you start **eating**.

Gandhi, weak as a lamb, asks him softly, "**Why** are you going to hell?" He answers, "Because I killed a child. A Muslim child. They killed **my** child. My son. About this high." [He tearfully gestures to the height of a 5 or 6 year old.]

Gandhi says, "I know a way out of hell." The man asks, "How?" Gandhi tells him, "Go find a child, a child without a father or mother. A child about this high.... A Muslim child. Take him into your home. Raise him as your own. Raise him as a Muslim." The man is stunned, looks at Gandhi as if he's crazy. Then his harsh countenance melts, the tears come, and he collapses over Gandhi's cot, crying.

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” When the man killed, it was as if he did that to Jesus. When Gandhi offered that man the way out of hell, it was as if he did that to Jesus. When we usher the hungry out of a living hell by giving them food, it is as if we do that to Jesus. When we keep prisoners in a hell of isolation and echoed condemnation, it is as if we do that to Jesus. It is a paradox, but it is true. By putting others in hell or being content to leave them there, we condemn ourselves to the same fate. By escorting others out, we find our own freedom.

Driving along on Thursday, I saw a sign outside a Nazarene church that read,  
 “Don’t make me come down there!” God  
 Like a parent threatening children bickering in the basement, the sign suggests that God is threatening to come down if we don’t shape up. I don’t buy it.

This Christ the King gospel gives us a beautiful segue into Advent because it reminds us that the Christ who told the parable came once as Jesus of Nazareth and will come again as Judge. Equally importantly it reminds us that He is **here now**, in what Mother Teresa would call his most distressing disguise of the poor. How can we imagine God **threatening** to come down when a) He is **already** here, although “in disguise,” and b) we are taught to **pray** for Him to return in the Advent mantra, *Maranatha*, “Come, Lord Jesus.” That is the cry in the second half of the second-to-last verse in the entire Bible, the Book of Revelation, chapter 22, verse 20: “Come, Lord Jesus!”

We Lutheran Christians believe that He came once in humility as the Babe of Bethlehem, He will come again in glory as Judge of all, and He comes now in Word and Sacrament as well as in the stranger, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick and the

imprisoned. He comes in the Holy Supper we celebrate today, and also in the baptismal waters that both literally bathed and symbolically drowned Baby Thomas Edward Anderson Bubnowski in a neonatal intensive care unit on his second day of life, July 3, 2005. A day later the doctor told his mother, “This morning I couldn’t believe this was the same baby I saw a couple days ago.” The doctor said this because he was so much physically stronger. But his mother, Diana, told the doctor, “He **isn’t** the same baby! He was baptized yesterday, and now he’s part of the family of God and the Holy Trinity family.” She said this because he was so much spiritually stronger....

Jesus is here. He’s here for all of us lefties and righties, when we’re right and when we’re wrong, whether we’re the prisoner behind bars or the visitor peering through them, the victim of the crime or its perpetrator, the one dropping off peanut butter for the food pantry or the one who picks it up and takes it back home to fill an empty cupboard, the patient or the physician or the pink lady who brings by magazines, whether we’re the clamdigger or the benny, the one anticipating a sentence to hell or the one who shows us the way out.... He is here **with** us. He is God-with-us, Emmanuel. He is here **for** us. He is Christ the King. Will we recognize Him today? Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Olson