

Last Sunday after Pentecost
Feast of Christ the King
Sermon for November 26, 2023
The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Psalm 100
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

I feel guilty a lot.
Last week and this week, and for lots of weeks,
I feel guilty after reading the Gospel lessons.

There's always more I could have done,
or things that I shouldn't have done.

It's always something, and I always feel guilty.
I guess that's why we say the confession each week.

It's not that I don't want to do what I ought to have done
and not done what I ought not to have done,
but something always comes up.

And let's face it, for me, life is a lot clearer looking backward.

Take last week's reading about the talents.
That poor guy who buried the talent
was only trying to take care of his master's stuff.
So he gets tossed into the outer darkness.

For crying out loud,
if you wanted me to do something besides hold on to it, tell me!

And today's gospel: it's a whole lot easier to think
that I did the right things and God just loves me to pieces –
even when I didn't know it was the right thing.

So Lord, I don't remember seeing you around,
so when was it that I did all those good things for you?

That's the person I like to be.
The one who gets it right without knowing it.

But you know what?
That's not the person I am most of the time.
I'm the other guy.

Hey Lord, I've been looking around and I haven't seen you anywhere.
Where have you been hanging, 'cause I haven't seen you anywhere?

That's the harsh reality. We don't see Jesus around us much.
We prefer to think about Jesus as Christ the King:
he's out there somewhere, sitting on a throne
and taking care of the eternal business,
so we'll catch you when you get around to coming back.

Till then, we'll each take care of ourselves.
So Let's keep a positive spin on this,
and encourage people with a loving message.
That's kind of why we might choose the happy section of Matthew 25
to model behavior, rather than the judgmental section.

But that's the problem, 'cause I always feel guilty
about what I'm not doing.
I rather don't want to face that judgment.

It happens every time I pass a corner and see somebody out there
with a cardboard sign asking for help.
It happens every time somebody calls me and asks for help.
It happens every time I turn on the news
and see the faces of starving people.

What can I do? I'm only one person.
There is such need, and I keep remembering the admonition of Jesus:
give to those who ask.

So what do I do?
- Turn away from the cardboard signs.
- Mute the TV when those Children's Fund commercials come on.
- Stop answering the phone because I can't say no.

Yes, I do those things, and when I do, I feel guilty.
And I feel really guilty this upcoming season.

I'd like to think everyone is happy.
But they're not.
People worry about inflation, the high prices.
Some lose their jobs. Others just try to make ends meet.
So we all pray that we will be delivered from our distress.

And I feel guilty,
particularly when I hear the words of Jesus from today's Gospel:
"When you did NOT do it to the least of these,
you did NOT do it to me."

I work at this a lot.
I've heard the arguments and the rationales
for not giving to people on the street.

But when I don't, I feel guilty.

Sometimes, I indulge in the judging game:
Are they really in need, or are they just faking it?

A friend last year came back from India
and she was told not to give to the beggars
because they were being used as a form of prostitution:
begging and turning over what they collect to a boss.

Another friend judges by looking at the person's shoes.
If they're wearing good shoes, they aren't really in need.

Another watches for Starbuck's cups:
Obviously if they can afford a Starbuck's, they're not in need.

I always feel guilty when I play that judging game, so I've stopped.

When I get a donation for my discretion,
I get \$5 bills and keep them in the console of my car
to make it easier to give money to those who ask.
(I used to do \$1 coins, but with inflation ...)

When I have a chance,
I've started asking the person's name
and telling them that I will say a prayer for them,
and give them a blessing.

The measure I try to use is whether my offering something
will put them in danger in the traffic.
I do what I can.
I'm working on trying to see with the eyes of Jesus.

As Paul writes today:
"I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation
as you come to know him,

so that,
with the eyes of your heart enlightened,
you may know what is the hope to which he has called you...”

We are each other’s hope.
We are given the insights of our master
so that we don’t have to wait for the coming of the King of Glory,
but work to make that kingdom in the here and now.

We take care of each other
because we know that it is not enough to take care of ourselves.

As it says in the collect today,
“Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth,
divided and enslaved by sin,
may be freed and brought together
under his most gracious rule.”

This is the guidance we ask so that one day,
when the King comes he will say:

‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you
from the foundation of the world...’

Amen.