

November 22, 2020 Reign of Christ/Transgender

Matthew 25:31-46

The reminder in today's gospel is straightforward, it seems to me. We will encounter Jesus in the 'least of these' — in the hungry and the thirsty. In the stranger and the naked and the sick and those in prison. Oh no, our faith is not only of the mind and of the heart, but is also for the hands and the feet. We live our faith in what we do. We live it in what we do in places that aren't always pretty. We live with the choice we make, because our choices matter.

Today, it is not only Reign of Christ Sunday – the last Sunday of the Christian year, but we are also recognizing Transgender Day of Remembrance. In the United Church, being trans can play a significant role in a person's spiritual life. For First Nations people, we also have "two-spirited" individuals. Due to the many challenges and blessings that occur, the experience of having a gender identity that is different from their biological or assigned sex, expressing their gender in ways that differ from societal expectations, and/or transitioning (from female to male, or male to female) are opportunities for deep spiritual reflection and growth. The call to authenticity is sacred. The trans and non-binary person is forced to peer deeply into their own soul in order to confront and evaluate the

meaning of their life, in a way that others rarely need to do. These are spiritual questions that go to the fundamental nature of being. Being trans is not about having a “problem” that needs “fixing,” whether that be gender or sexuality—it is about unifying the body and soul and becoming whole. For the trans person, being true to their own originality is a spiritual issue because it is the way in which spiritual truths are physically embodied. Trans people merit acknowledgement of their sacredness and uniqueness simply because they are human beings who hold within themselves a grain of the sacred, as we all do. They have voices and are seeking the truth. By their presence in the world they sanctify all life. Those who stand outside of the trans community need to learn to listen and respond with an embrace that signifies the holiness, dearness, sacredness, and depth of another human being.

The United Church believes that God has brought forth human beings as creatures who are male, female, and sometimes dramatically or subtly a complex mix of male and female in their bodies. Human cultures have created a broad diversity of roles for men and women, and have sometimes created roles for people named as neither male nor female, often revered and respected roles. Rules of appearance in the Bible, such as in Deuteronomy 22:5 (wearing clothes of the opposite sex) are certainly among the rules criticized by Jesus as focused on

outward conformity rather than inward integrity grounded in the acceptance of God's love. There are numerous biblical affirmations of the goodness of creation and the love of God for all people. If we were to follow this mandate, trans and non-binary people would **not** be excluded but welcomed as equals, nor would distinctions be placed on the roles of women and men.

Any trans-inclusive theology begins with the premise that there is no need to justify trans people. The acceptance that we are diverse and that a person's gender has no intrinsic bearing on their worth is central to any life-giving understanding of the gospel. Jesus, Christ the King, in the prophetic tradition of his ancestors, insists that the table is open to everyone, especially those forced to the margins. Whether you are trans, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, two-spirited, or queer in any other way, you are welcome in our realm of Christ's love.

So, as we refer back to our gospel reading, and how it connects to this Transgender Day of Remembrance, who is this King of Everything? Who is this Jesus hanging out in the least, the lost, the poor, and the imprisoned? How were we supposed to know to look for God in the dark and dirty places of the world? God is right there with everyone in the midst of daily life in all its mundane messiness rather than holed up with the holy in the Temple or marooned on

some majestic mountaintop. It's not even in the recognition that Jesus is interested; he's focused on action.

The King of Everything is interested in what we're doing with our days and hours and with whom we're in relationship and how that is expressed. I know we are on severe "lockdown" per say right now, as Bonnie Henry looks out for our well being, but think of your life before Covid came! Think about who and where you see yourself when we climb out of this despairing place of pandemic. If we're simply hanging out with others who are just like us, doing as little as possible, wiling away the hours thinking about Christ's second coming, then that is in stark contrast to what Jesus calls us to be. If we're about living each moment to its fullest — in the business of cultivating relationships, tending to the needs of friend and neighbour (and enemy, too!), and wading into life's most difficult places and situations, including Trans people, with the light of Christ shining brighter than LED Christmas lights, then we're definitely on the right track.

When we think about our gospel, we can think about the least of these, and they are in all our lives. They do not always fit our stereotyped images. Sure, it might be the guy on the street corner asking for a handout. It might be a welfare mother asking for food or the guy who just got out of prison, again. It might be

the trans person who just got kicked out of their home for merely trying to embrace their true identity, or who instead got murdered for just being themselves. Sometimes, though, it is one who lives under the same roof as me or sits across the table from me. And it's not always about physical needs. The least of these also have emotional and spiritual needs.

The least of these are in all our relationships. They are the people over whom we have some sense of power and control. They are the ones who have less resources and options than we do. They are the ones persecuted for their sexual orientation, and even murdered. They are the ones overwhelmed by life and underwhelmed by support. They are the ones who feel they are hanging on by a thread and they look at us as if we hold the scissors. They are the ones we threaten or intimidate simply because of who we are, what we have, what we can do. Who are the least of these in your life? Some are anonymous. Some might be in your circle of life.

I think we all want to make a difference. We want to make a difference in the life of another, in the world, in the church. Maybe that's why we sometimes struggle with our decisions and the choices we make. It's the reason we ask

guidance from others. It's the reason we pray for God's will. Deep down we really do want to make a difference. We want to do what's right.

Well, I have some good news for you and I have some bad news. You don't have to try to make a difference. You can quit trying. You already **ARE** making a difference. Every single one of you is making a difference. I am making a difference. Here's the bad news. I don't know if that's for good or ill. We often don't know.

The people gathered for judgment in today's gospel have no idea what difference they are making. They are just going on about their lives. Let's not literalize this story. I just don't think that's what today's gospel is about. That's too easy. We already know we should help and care for one another.

Maybe the goat and sheep metaphor worked in Jesus' day but I don't think it makes much sense to us today. We need a new metaphor. We need a new way of understanding what's going on. Maybe what's really being said is that there are two ways. We are pulled by God in one direction and our humanity in another. Or we could see it as the conflict and contraction between our humanity and our inhumanity. Another way would be to say that we live in the light and follow a

path of light and we that we also live in the darkness and follow that path. It's never just one or the other. Its always both.

If we are really honest with ourselves, if we look deep within, we will see our humanity and our inhumanity. We will see both our light and our darkness, our divinity and our humanity. What if this story is about pushing us to look at the truth of our lives, to look at the choices we make, and to be aware that our choices matter.

You might say that you didn't bomb, harass, or shoot anyone. I don't doubt or dispute that. That's not the point. We may not be guilty but we all are responsible. We are responsible for the choices we make – to choose light, to choose life, to choose the least of these. What does it mean for you and me to choose light in the aftermath of various events? What might that look like in each of our individual lives?

These are not choices that live outside us. They live in each one of us. How we choose begins to set a trajectory and direction for our lives. I don't think any of us get to that final place – whatever it is or however we understand it – overnight. It's not a one-time event or a single decision. It's a series of choices and the further down the road we go, whether it is the road of light or the road of

darkness, the harder it is and the longer it takes to return. Christ the King, sitting on the throne of his glory, simply names what is, what he sees. What do you see when you look at your life? What are the least of these showing you?

So, on this Reign of Christ Sunday, where we acknowledge the pain and suffering and persecution of transgendered people all over the world, let our gospel passage be a wake-up call. Let it be the chance to see yourself through the eyes of one of the least of these. What do they see? Is that who you want to be? What choices will lead you on the path of light? A choice awaits each one of us. What will we choose? Who will we be? Amen.