

Homily – Our Actions Matter

Rob Keim

November 22, 2020 – St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church

Here at St. Barnabas we are blessed with a nine acre main campus. With the pandemic many of you have not been on the campus since March, and some of you have never been on our campus. You attend our worship virtually, and you have never been to Arroyo Grande. Be that as it may, the nine acres takes some work. There is gardening and landscaping, and water management and general grounds clean-up. Since we are in fire country, each year we have brush clearing and weed abatement to take care of, and once again this year we used a herd of over one hundred goats to eat down the weeds and grasses. Goats eat almost anything. They even eat poison oak. We have been very blessed by goats, so it is a little odd to have them demonized in today's Gospel reading. Unlike the blessed sheep, the goats are put on the left hand and are cursed. The poor goats are good only for the eternal fire and punishment. But, I should point out that goats are not so classified because of who they are or what they believe. Instead the goats miss out on the blessings of God because of what they do or more specifically the ways they fail to act. Our actions have consequences on our well-being and on our spiritual journeys.

Today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. This feast day was added by the Roman Catholic Church about one hundred years ago in the wake of the horrors of World War One. While there had been a cessation of hostilities after the war there was no true peace. Class division and nationalism were rampant. Christ the King was meant to model the best practices of a ruler. We all know that in his lifetime, Jesus refused to be king. Others wanted him to take on that role, but instead Jesus models a better way. Jesus shows us that being a servant leader who connects people to one another, this type of leader is in line with the Kingdom of God.

Jesus refers to the Kingdom of God more than 110 times in the Gospels. We sometimes think that the Kingdom of God is only with us after death, but it is with us in this lifetime. And, the Kingdom of God is not a place. It is a state of being. It is that next state of consciousness that I talked about last week. God is constantly working to shift us, as individuals and as a species, into a state of consciousness that focuses on love, wholeness, and union. Can you imagine a world in which more of us have achieved love, wholeness, and union with God? That is what Jesus means by the Kingdom of God, and that is what we focus on with Christ the King Sunday. And once again, today's Gospel readings gives us some clues from Jesus on how we might achieve this higher level of being.

Today's reading is about oneness. We are to be one with the hungry and the thirsty. We are to embrace the stranger and the naked. We are to pick up the burdens of the

sick and the imprisoned and make those burdens our own. We are to be at one with all of those in need and as a result we see God in them. God is in you. God is in me. God is in all of us. The Spirit of God connects all things, and it is the recognition and acceptance of this oneness that leads us into the Kingdom of God that is promised to us by Jesus.

However, most of us live in a world in which separateness dominates. We divide ourselves into us and them. We surround ourselves with people who are already like us. Gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, religion, age – we separate ourselves in so many ways. As followers of Jesus we are called to a different place or more accurately we are called to a different way of being. I am convinced that we are being called by Jesus to a unitive consciousness at every level: personal, relational, social, political, cultural, and spiritual. This is the unique and central job of healthy spirituality and religion.

Now, over the last few months, I have been talking about an approach to this healthy spirituality that focuses on the three-fold way of knowing. We know with our minds, we know with our hearts, and we know with our moving centers or bodies. In twenty-first century America we are pretty good at knowing with our minds. Rational thinking is king. But, healthy spirituality means that we must also know with our hearts and bodies. We must practice these others ways of knowing until they are as strong and useful to us as our minds.

Our minds are good at helping us know by grouping things into categories. Our minds work by giving us perception through separation. And, it does no good to use the mind, this tool of separation to achieve oneness. Instead, we must use our heart centered way of knowing to see how we are connected to one another. Remember the heart center is not the seat of passionate emotions. Instead, the heart center is how we perceive connections with the universe around us. The heart is the organ of spiritual perception. Its function is to see, and to see through the prism of love, but not with sentimental love and drama. Jesus comes out of this lineage that understands the heart as an organ of spiritual sight, of spiritual clarity, luminosity, clairvoyance that not only lights up the invisible, but brings that light into dialogue with this planet, so that we see the two together. We see what goes on in this world, in the light of that luminosity. Our journeys toward mystical union are led by the heart center, but the mind or intellectual center can keep getting in the way of this journey, especially when we see ourselves as separate and superior to others.

American author Dave Berry once said “a person who is nice to you but rude to the waiter is not a nice person. The way you treat other people, especially people who have nothing to offer you is a telling aspect of your character. When someone is rude or disrespectful to a stranger like a barista or a server it shows that they are

superficial and over-privileged. It can signify that they are only charming or kind when they have something to gain from the other person. First written about in Swanson's Unwritten Rules of Management this is known as "the waiter rule" and we can use it to gauge how caring, considerate, and empathetic a person truly is. Of course, "the waiter rule" should be applied more broadly than just wait-staff. And, one way to succeed at "the waiter rule" is to tip well. A few years back I dated a poker dealer who worked in a card room in San Jose. This man was one of the best conversationalists I have ever met, for he earned most of his income from tips. As people sat at the poker table he kept the conversation going, and he kept it positive. And he taught me the importance of tipping well. Hotels, restaurants, and barbers, it is important to tip well.

Conversely, I am ashamed to say that there have been times that I have failed "the waiter rule." I even hate thinking about it but, here is one example. A few years ago, the bishop was visiting my parish for Easter, and we had a celebratory breakfast between services. As I was sitting down at a table with my food, a homeless man who I had talked to several times sat down with me. And, then the bishop sat down with us. We were all eating and the homeless man starting talking to me, and at some point I responded to him by saying "that's nice." And, the bishop said to me, "Rob, that's not appropriate. He is telling you that he has been sick and in the hospital, and you say "that nice?"" I had not been listening. I was on autopilot, and I was rude to the homeless man. Today, I still feel ashamed, and I use that shame to remember to do better. And yes, I still remember the homeless man's name, and I wonder how he is doing. In that way I am still connected to him.

Now, one of our goals here at St. Barnabas is to help you connect with others and to go deeper in your spiritual journeys. We are here to help each other move into that oneness that is a characteristic of the Kingdom of God. We are here to help you get better at passing "the waiter rule" as we open our hearts to those around us. This is hard to do when those around us are part of our bubble and part of our demographic group.

In my last parish, our most effective oneness ministry was a lunch program in which we fed a thousand people a week, seventy percent of whom were immigrants from Asia. That was the need in that community. Here in our community our most effective oneness ministry is our St. Barnabas Thrift Shop. This ministry provides very low-cost, high-quality goods to those who need them. We sell a hundred dollar pair of pants for five dollars. The Shop provides opportunities for you to serve those in our community with whom you might not always rub elbows. This ministry allows us to raise money for the operating of our church, and money to give away to local agencies who serve the community. Our St. Barnabas Thrift Shop sells both new and used goods that have been donated instead of going into the landfill. With this St.

Barnabas Thrift Shop ministry we are lifting up ourselves and those in our community so that they can live better lives.

And, as many of you know, after many years of discernment we decided that we had outgrown our current Thrift Shop building on Brisco Road. So, we sold it for a good amount of money, about \$400,000. Our Thrift Shop Transition Team has begun the work to get prequalified for financing of a new building, and we have begun a capital campaign to raise money to help pay for a new building. We have already raised two-thirds of our \$350,000 capital campaign goal. Our plan is to buy a new building and move into it so that once the pandemic is under control, we can restart this important oneness ministry and grow the beauty that has been so important to us for more than forty years. So today, I want to ask your help in restarting this ministry.

Even during this time in which we are sheltering at home, we had begun asking some of you to donate to our capital campaign. Thank you to those of you who have already stepped forward with your generous donations. I don't think we have had any six figure donations but we certainly have four and five figure donations. Over the next few weeks we will be sending out a letter asking you to donate. Would you prayerfully consider what you can give to this important ministry. Some of you may be able to give four and five figure donations. And, maybe there is even someone who feels called to give a six figure donation. Please pray to discern what God is calling you to give, and thank you for your generosity. Any amount of money is appreciated.

Similar to one hundred years ago, when the Feast of Christ the King was created, we live in a divided world with rampant classism and nationalism. We still need to be reminded that the Kingdom of God is a elevating of our consciousness to love, wholeness, and union. When we feed the hungry and cloth the naked we are moving into that unitive consciousness. Our actions have consequences and our St. Barnabas Thrift Shop helps us stop acting like a goat, and start acting like a sheep. But, don't worry. Even the goats are the beloved of God.