Christ the King and Stewardship Sunday
Last Pentecost, November 22, 2026
Saint John's Episcopal Church
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the final Sunday of this Christian year. In a way, the whole Christian year has been leading up this morning, when we celebrate Christ's final victory over sin and suffering and death, and the final establishment of God's kingdom.

But today is also Stewardship Sunday, so I want to begin with a few words about Christian stewardship.

We talk about stewardship for two very different reasons, and both matter.

One reason we talk about stewardship is because stewardship is, humanly speaking, what keeps our Church going.

My first year at Saint David's, a woman associated with the parish asked if we would give her son First Communion classes. Not all parishes make a big deal about first communions, but it was important to her, so I was happy to accommodate.

At our final session, I expressed the hope that she and her son would continue worshipping with us after the First Communion itself.

She responded with startling candor. She was grateful for what we were doing. But she probably wouldn't be back for the foreseeable future. She added that she was glad to know the Church would always be there for her, and she would call us if she ever needed anything.

I don't remember what I replied. I would like to think I was gracious. But what I wanted to say is, "The Church will not always be here if everyone takes your attitude."

Because, I say what is obvious, Churches only exist as long as people make it happen. Churches need people to show up—in person and online—to participate in, and help lead worship.

Churches require lots of work behind the scenes to do all the things that we do.

And Churches need money. Our stewardship drive is happening now because, over the course of the next month or so, the vestry will put together a budget for next year, and pledges are the single most important factor in our budget.

Thankfully, people have been showing up for Saint John's for two hundred years. I'm still new, but I have already seen the way you show up for Saint John's now. And, because Saint John's is already important to me, too, I thank you for that.

But that's only one reason to talk about stewardship and not the most important one. In our stewardship letter for last year, Mark Hatch wrote that "Stewardship is everything that comes after, 'I believe….'

That is to say, stewardship is not only, not even mainly, about the Church.

Stewardship is another word for the life of faith. Stewardship is how each of us spend our time, and how we use our gifts, and how we spend our money. And, when you put them all together, how we use our time and our talents and our treasure does a lot to shape our relationship with God.

That's what we see in our Gospel reading for this morning.

It's a dramatic scene. The Son of Man in all his glory, surrounded by angels, sitting on a throne of glory. All the nations gathered before him. And then the great sorting into sheep and goats. The sheep, who are welcomed into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. And the goats, whose lot is considerably less desirable.

But what I first notice is what Jesus does NOT say as he does the sorting. Jesus doesn't mention the Church. Jesus doesn't even talk about faith.

Jesus just has one question for the gathered multitude. How did you treat the hungry, and the thirsty, and the stranger, and the naked, and the sick, and the prisoner? Because how we treat "the least of these" is how we treat Jesus himself.

It's a stewardship question. How do we use the life God gives us, and the spiritual gifts God gives us, and the resources God gives us? Do we use them as God calls us to do? Do we live as God's beloved children? Do we live lives of love and generosity and gratefulness? Or not?

I spent some time this week imagining myself there, before the throne, talking to Christ. I imagined the conversation we might have, assuming I didn't dissolve into a quivering mass of terrified jelly.

I imagine Jesus asking me to think about my life. How did I do?

My temptation would be to respond in meaningless generalities and with lots of excuses. "Well, I think I did OK, all things considered."

But as we see over and over again in the Gospels, Jesus is no dummy. I imagine Jesus pressing.

"Let's take a specific example. How about last Sunday, when you left home a little late and got caught behind a slow car? You remember. You were on your way to Church to hear Andy's sermon about God's love. How did you do then?"

I confess to you that, last Sunday, my heart was not filled with love as I oh so slowly made my way to Church. I was in a frenzy of impatience and was thinking uncharitable thoughts about the driver in front of me.

But if I were standing in front of Jesus's throne of glory at the final judgment, I couldn't say that. I'd hem and haw a little.

I imagine Jesus reminding me that he is actually pretty busy. That he has already interviewed four billion people, and that he still has several billion to go.

So, Jesus says, "let's cut to the chase. How did you treat the hungry and thirsty and sick and so on? And not only, how did you treat them. What was going on in your heart? Did you act in love?"

Of course, the true answer is, sometimes I got it right, but a lot of times I did not.

And then comes the pause. And it doesn't look great for me.

And, finally, I imagine Jesus saying, in the words of our reading from Ephesians, "Let me enlighten the eyes of your heart to the hope to which I have called you, to the riches of your glorious inheritance among the saints, and to the immeasurable greatness of my power for you."

Or, if Jesus were in a hurry, perhaps, with a sigh, "Just go join the sheep."

I don't imagine Jesus letting me join the sheep because I got it right just enough. Jesus lets us join the sheep because Jesus loves us, even when we don't get it right.

That is the heart of the Gospel, the message of God's grace and love and forgiveness. That message should give us the courage to stand tall, even when we know that we often fail in our Christian responsibility. We stand tall because we don't stand on our own strength, but in the power of Christ who loves us and gave himself for us.

But the Christian gospel doesn't offer cheap grace. Our failures don't define our relationship with God. But we *are* called to lives of faithfulness and love. And stewardship season is one of the times our Church invites us each to reflect on what that call looks like in our individual lives.

And so, if you have not already done so, I invite you to spend time in prayer over your pledge card. Ponder your financial giving. Perhaps even more importantly, ponder how God is inviting you to use your time and talents, in the Church and also in the world.

And, on this Christ the King Sunday, look forward, in confidence and hope and joy, to Christ's ultimate victory.

In Christ's name. Amen.