

## **I *Thought* She Looked Familiar...**

[Text - Matthew 25:31-46]

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Whenever a preacher does research for the Reign of Christ Sunday, he or she will inevitably come across some rather bizarre writings. On-line, there are various Christian authors pushing their odd obsessions about the Antichrist or Armageddon, the Rapture or the Book of Revelation. And while these peculiar speculations may seem harmless in-and-of themselves, they often betray a much deeper problem. Much of what I encountered this week contained this fundamentally flawed viewpoint: 'Christians today are too caught-up focusing on the problems of *this* world, which isn't their real home. What they really need to concentrate on is separating themselves from this world, and getting ready for Christ's Reign in the Heavenly Realm to come.'

Although it is perfectly fine to contemplate on a future - or even a final - aspect of Christ's Reign, it's extremely important how we do this. I realize that for some, speculating about cryptic Biblical signs - which could point to Christ's imminent coming - may be exciting. Personally, though, I have no idea as to when or how Christ might return; therefore, I find it best to focus on how Christ can rule in my life *right now*. It seems to me that if we are truly serious about getting ready for Christ's Coming Reign, then living-out the core values that Jesus Christ proclaims is a great way to do so!

When we look at what Jesus teaches, and how he lives, we have a wonderful example of one who is loving and kind, warm and open, giving and forgiving. Jesus meets people wherever they are, and rather than telling them how imperfect they are, he tells them and shows them how perfectly they are loved by their Divine, Creative Source. And in the name and power of that

Divine Source, Jesus reaches out to all kinds of people with welcome and acceptance, compassion and grace, healing and peace. This is what Jesus lives for, and even *dies* for: a love that doesn't judge, doesn't exclude, and doesn't give up; a love that even finds the capacity to forgive those who seek to destroy it. And after the powers of fear and death have done their worst to Jesus, the deeper power of Divine Love and Life rises-up triumphant, to reign throughout the ages!

Today, as you and I await the culmination of that Divine Reign of triumph, our instructions are quite clear and fairly simple: Love one another; treat people fairly; show kindness; and graciously share with those in need. For when we do these things, you and I actually help usher in that future and final Heavenly Realm. Simply praying "Thy kingdom come...on earth as it is in heaven" just doesn't cut it. It's about how you and I live and act 'on earth' - in the here-and-now - that truly matters. And according to Jesus, our present-day actions can carry *eternal* ramifications; as this morning's New Testament reading describes.

"When the Anointed One comes in glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on the throne of glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats....Then the Sovereign will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed, inherit the Realm prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food...Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.'"

According to this story [and the story of Jesus' entire life] Jesus identifies completely with the least and the lost, the poor and the sick, the imprisoned and the oppressed. He's right there with them, in the midst of Life's most pressing problems. And while both the "sheep" and the "goats" are surprised that they didn't

recognize him in those places or those people, Jesus really isn't concerned about their recognition. What he cares about is their *action* - and *ours!* That we use our time and energy and resources tending to the needs of those around us; because, according to this story [and the story of Jesus' entire life] you and I help create heaven - or hell - right here on earth!

The earth can produce ample food and resources for all people to be fed and clothed and housed. However, when we waste and destroy massive resources waging war, countless individuals face the hell of pain and violence, destruction and loss. When we refuse to share with one another, untold numbers suffer hunger, emptiness and want. When a tiny minority of this world's population amass, control and hoard the vast majority of this world's wealth and resources, millions of others needlessly suffer and die. And while you and I can speak-up and try to change "them", our most effective and immediate course, is to take action ourselves - to increase our efforts to feed the hungry, clothe the needy, comfort the afflicted, and embrace the lonely and lost. Because if you and I truly desire to promote the *future* Reign of Christ on earth, right *now* is the only time we have to help bring about its glorious manifestation.

In Jesus' parable, all those gathered indicate that they would have been quite willing to feed or clothe or comfort that Sovereign One, if only they had seen him in need. Apparently, they *had!* They just didn't recognize him because he was presented to them in the form of a hungry child, a suffering widow, an incarcerated teenager, an "illegal" alien, a neighbor in need. People will often say, "If I had only *known*, I would have done things differently!" Well, now we know! And if we keep our focus on caring and sharing, Christ's Perfect Realm of Peace and Love can become our every-day reality.